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To the Rev. Mr. Ferris
Lauderdale Hall

LAUTERDALE.

—

VOL. I.

“If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue. Yet to good wine they do use good bushes; and good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues. What a case am I in then, that am neither a good epilogue, nor cannot insinuate with you in the behalf of a good play! I am not furnished like a beggar, therefore to beg will not become me: my way is to conjure you; and I will begin with the women.

“I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this (tale) as please you; and I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women,—as I perceive by your simpering none of you hates them,—that between you and the women the (tale) may please.”—*As you Like It*.

LAUTERDALE

A Story of Two Generations

IN THREE VOLUMES.—I.

STRAHAN & CO.

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1873

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DEDICATED
TO MASTERS AND MEN IN ENGLAND,
IN THE HOPE OF CREATING
A BETTER FEELING
BETWEEN THEM.

SYDENHAM,

August, 1873.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME I.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE NEW MANAGER	1
II. "THE FORGE POOL"	19
III. LAUTERDALE	33
IV. THE DALE HOUSE	45
V. THE FORGE	54
VI. THE MILLER	67
VII. THE GIPSY	78
VIII. THE METHODYS	91
IX. THE PREACHER	103
X. SILAS CLAYTON	112
XI. THE PERKS FAMILY	125
XII. THE PHILANTHROPIST	138
XIII. THE VICAR	149
XIV. RACHEL FLETCHER	161
XV. THE STUDENT	179
XVI. FRIENDS IN NEED	192
XVII. THE MERCHANT	209
XVIII. RIVALS	222
XIX. ON THE RIVER	234

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. TWILIGHT	254
XXI. CLOSING IN	271
XXII. MUDDING THE POOL	285
XXIII. DARKNESS	300
XXIV. DESOLATION	310

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW MANAGER.

“ Full knee-deep lies the winter snow,
And the winter winds are wearily sighing :
Toll ye the church-bell sad and slow,
And tread softly and speak low,
For the old year lies a-dying.”

TENNYSON.

ABOUT thirty years ago—when railways had just penetrated the northern and midland counties of England—there existed on the summit of a large cinder-mountain, close to some outlying furnaces of a great iron company in a north-western county, the most forlorn and dismal-looking railway station which the ingenuity of an unskilful engineer, sadly deficient in taste, and equally at a loss for funds, could possibly have contrived.

Previous to his operations it was a bleak, desolate spot, where the scoræ and cinders of centuries of iron manufacture had been piled in huge heaps, bearing witness to the industry of bygone generations ; but the erection of a rickety platform and an unsightly passenger shed, both painted a sombre hue, and fast

settling down amidst the surrounding chaos, together with a gallows-like signal-post much out of perpendicular, added to the weird, uncanny aspect of the place, and marked it out as the *Ultima Thule* of railway progress and the end of all things, so far as locomotion by steam in that quarter was concerned.

The waste tip mounds of numerous "pit workings," with hideous engine-sheds and blackened head-gear, lay scattered around, lit up by the flame of a solitary blast furnace at full work, which shed a fitful glare over the cinder heaps and the bleak moorland beyond.

On a board which hung flapping from a shaky fence some local artist had inscribed the word "Brightmoor," in crooked straggling letters, and close beside it, with his left ear cocked in a listening attitude, carefully balancing himself on one good leg and a timber substitute for the other which was missing, generally stood Jem Ritson, who discharged the functions of station-master, porter, and booking-clerk in one, filling up his spare time by carving the initial letters of his name on such of the fence rails as had survived the continuous assaults of his clasp-knife.

The branch railway which came to an undignified end at Brightmoor was private property, and was worked on economic principles—its chief passengers being rough miners and colliers willing to ride on anything, no matter how hard and uncomfortable, so long as the fare was only a few pence.

Twice on each week-day a clumsy composite carriage, having one first-class compartment, was attached to the

tail of a mineral train, drawn at an average speed of six miles an hour to and from the junction with the great railway from Birmingham to the north, about twelve miles distant; and patiently waiting for the advent of this fast phenomenon, now more than an hour overdue, on a cold December Saturday night in the year 18— stood the aforesaid Jem Ritson, like a heron on one leg, in an attitude of painful and tensile attention.

It had been snowing lightly for some hours, but had recently “changed for the waur,” as they say in the north. A chilling sleet now blew right in the direction from whence the expected train should arrive, adding materially to the difficulties already experienced by the driver of the strange-looking high-built locomotive, in appearance like a grasshopper, upon whose noisy efforts and over-taxed powers the regularity of the service depended. At the best of times the engine was said to be “hard set” to surmount the severe gradients, and grind round the sharp curves of this crooked branch line, which had originally been laid as a horse tramway, and recently converted into a railway. Indeed, to get out and shove behind was by no means an uncommon expedient with the exasperated passengers when it was announced by the engine-driver that “she was dead bet, and couldn’t draw another pund, not if she was screwed down and fired up to busting.”

On this December night the rails were slippery with snow and sleet; but by dint of hard firing and the frequent application of the shoving process before mentioned, the train had at length reached the station next

to that ruled over by Jem Ritson, where the iron and coal waggons were detached for the neighbouring works, and the grimy colliers who formed the chief part of the passenger load departed to their cottages, cursing the unlucky locomotive as "an old kettle not fit to tie to a dog's tail," and vowing that it would be much easier and cheaper to walk.

Relieved from the greater part of his charge, and refreshed by a pull at a can of cold tea, the half-frozen driver remounted the foot-plate of the engine, where the stoker was busy shovelling coals into the fire-box. "Fire at 'er, Ben! fire at 'er, lad!" he said briskly; and then having ascertained, by opening and shutting mysterious cocks and valves, that there was steam enough and water enough to do the last half-mile of his journey, he intimated to the world in general his intention to proceed by grasping the handle of the steam-whistle, and causing the usual ear-piercing scream to rush forth like the wail of a lost spirit on the night, despite of wind and sleet penetrating even to the expectant ear of Jem Ritson, now on the verge of despair and almost frozen to an icicle on the distant platform at Brightmoor.

Upon Jem the effect was magical and alarming. Shaking the snow from his moleskin garments he responded to the whistle by a shout, and then pirouetted on his timber toe, with a skill and rapidity which bore witness to long and diligent practice.

He continued this revolving process until the red lamp of the engine appeared rounding a curve in the

adjacent cutting, when he made a dash at the station signal and frantically jerked the handle up and down, as if performing on a refractory pump; but inasmuch as the connecting-rods were broken, and as there was no lamp attached to the post, and no visible effect produced overhead in any other way, it was on the whole a work of supererogation. Having partially exhausted himself by this violent exertion, Jem next indulged in a sort of windmill exercise by vigorously beating his arms about his body, and thus, by the time the engine with the single carriage and a break-van drew up at the platform, he was totally cleared of snow, and far on towards a rapid thaw.

“Noo then, ye daft bodie,” exclaimed the engine-driver, jumping from the iron step before the train had ceased moving, “leuk alive efter yon van. Guard’s got off at Lawley Bank, and she’s chuck full o’ luggage. Fust-class passenger a blowin’ off at forty pund on th’ inch for last twa ’oors, an’s wife and childer maist froze. How in the name o’ conscience is he to get ’em into Dale at this ’oor o’ nicht?” he muttered to himself as he proceeded to unlock the carriage-door, at which the first-class passenger alluded to was violently hammering with fierce impatience.

“Where’s the guard?” shouted a sharp-looking, active man, springing from the compartment as soon as egress was permitted. “Are we to be penned up like cattle for hours on this wretched line of yours and frozen to icicles?” he inquired in wrath. “Where’s the guard? and where are we now?” he exclaimed,

turning from the engine-driver to Jem Ritson, who was silently inspecting the new arrival by the aid of a dim oil-lamp he had produced from the depths of his coat-pocket, where it had hitherto been secreted for the purpose of warmth.

"There baint no guard," said Jem, to whom the engine-driver, perceiving a storm, had handed over the indignant traveller. "Where's yer ticket?" he continued.

"No guard!" said the irate passenger, stamping up and down the platform in the snow; "and pray what are you?"

"Station-meister," said Jem, with stolid indifference, at the same time extending his hand for the ticket, and planting his wooden limb right in the path of the excited gentleman, who evidently suspected the guard was concealed in the van, until he had satisfied himself by personal inspection that it was occupied solely by his own luggage.

"This is *Broitmoor*," continued the offended official, "t' train goos no furdur."

"Goes no further to-night?" said the traveller, with surprise.

"No, nor in daytime neetherr," said Jem Ritson tartly; "Oi tell thee this is *Broitmoor* steechun, and Oi wants yer tickets."

On this occasion Jem used the plural, "tickets," observing that a lady, closely muffled up, was slowly emerging from the carriage, and rightly calculating that she was the property of the irascible individual whose further movement he was determined to hinder

until he had received the tickets, which he felt it his bounden duty to obtain the instant a passenger set foot on his wooden platform.

"John," said the lady timidly, in the tone of a woman who was much exhausted, and suffering from cold, "are we at our journey's end, and may the children come out?"

"I don't know where we are in this cursed country," replied her husband; "better get in again, Mary, until I find a conveyance, if there is such a thing in this God-forgotten place."

"Tell me," he said, turning angrily on the engine-driver, who had again cautiously approached on seeing the lady, in the hope of a lull in the threatened storm under female influence, "Tell me, how far is it to Lauterdale, and can I obtain a conveyance? I am Mr. Forster, the new manager, and I understand this is the Dale Company's line; can I not have any other assistance than that of this one-legged idiot?"

Here Jem advanced his despised wooden limb a step closer, and sullenly repeated his formula, "Oi want yer tickets."

"The gen'leman travels free," said the engine-driver. "Muster Wilson at the Junction said we was to tak' 'im and fam'ly to Broightmure to meet the Company's trap and a waggin for the boxes; hev you seen aught on 'em, Jemmy?"

Thus enlightened, and suddenly awake to the danger of offending an individual who was an exception to the general rule as to tickets, Jem explained that the trap in

question had been there over an hour since, but had left because the train was not expected, and, as he believed, "to save t' hosses from clemmin' wi' cold," adding, for the passengers' consolation, "Oi dunna think t' lad meaant to coom back till daylight, leastways Oi 'eard 'im say he wudna if the snow kep on, as Muster Forster 'ud be saafe to sleep at Junction."

However, as "Muster Forster" had not adopted that wise course, but insisted on travelling on, despite of the advice of every one, and was now left without any conveyance at this desolate place, the question was, how was he to get out of it, and down to Lauterdale? which, on inquiry, he learned was about two miles distant. At this moment the stoker, who had been attentively listening in the background, joined the council assembled round the carriage-door, and put in a word of advice, directed to no one in particular, and delivered in a hoarse, deep voice, which sounded as from the depths of an iron pump.

"Mawbee," said this huge, grimy fellow, speaking slowly over the edge of a greasy woollen comforter, swathed round his neck and ears, "Mawbee, Muster Forster 'ud as lief walk to Dale as wait here for yon trap, an' ef so be, Oi kin tak' 'im by a short coot down t' tram, and carry aught under quarter o' a ton in the way o' luggige."

To this proposal Mr. Forster readily assented as the only chance of reaching his destination that night, and after some delay in extracting two half-frozen boys and a pale, shivering little girl from amongst the frowsy cushions of the old carriage, and sorting out

such baggage as was absolutely required, he prepared to start in the wake of the friendly stoker, who secured the heavier articles to his broad shoulders by the aid of numerous leather straps, which he unhitched from various parts of his person without any apparent effect on the stability of the garments they had hitherto supported.

“You’ll not foind t’ tram ower nice walkin’ for t’ lads, Muster Forster,” said Jem Ritson at parting, “and yow’d better tak’ the little gell on yer back, or happen she’ll slip in t’ brook. Keep atween the metals,” he added, “until ye reach the big yew at t’ forge pool, when you’ll foind t’ path bearin’ t’ left ’ull tak’ you stret in t’ Dale.”

“But you’ll just hev big Ben in front o’ ye, and dinna lose sight o’ him,” said the engine-driver. “I’d go wi’ ye mysel’, but ma hoos lies t’other road, and I’m jest wearied oot wi’ yon wretched ingin. You’ll find folks stirrin’ in the hottle,” he added with a wink, “and tho’ they’re daft silly ’totallers, they’ll no refuse ye a drop o’ summit het, ef required in the nature o’ maydcine;—nae doot the missus and the bairns ’ull no’ be the waur o’ a stoup.”

The engine-driver was a north-countryman, who believed in the benefit of strong beverages in cases of emergency like the present; although whilst on his engine, like many of his hard-worked class, he never tasted anything but the cold tea we have seen him imbibing earlier on this miserable night, such being one of the terms of his hiring.

He would sooner have perished of cold than have deviated from these to the extent of a thimbleful of Scotch whisky whilst on duty, a deprivation for which he abundantly consoled himself on other occasions.

Mr. Forster stepped out stoutly after the friendly stoker, carrying his little daughter on one arm and a carpet-bag on the other, and followed by his silent, shivering wife, who led the younger of the two boys by the hand. The speed of the guide seemed marvellous considering the load he had undertaken, and he never once looked back to see whether his unfortunate followers were in sight or not, but strode through the darkness like a huge phantom Atlas, bearing away their worldly possessions.

The rear-guard of the little procession was brought up by the eldest boy, a lad of about sixteen years of age, who carried a small bag, and obeyed his father's sharp commands in a nervous manner, indicating that the law of fear was more generally imposed than the law of love where John Forster was concerned. For a little distance the path was lit by the flame of the neighbouring blast-furnace reflected from the snow, but this flickering fitful light faded out as they proceeded, and the horse-track between the angle irons which formed the tramway became difficult and dangerous for such small feet as those of the poor half-frozen boys. Silently, and almost mechanically, they followed their stern parent, whose word was a law never disobeyed by them in the smallest matter with impunity, but whose heart and soul were bound up in

the frail little creature he carried on his shoulder, who, as she clasped him tightly round the neck, looked back with loving, anxious eyes at her sad mother, walking silently behind them. In a little while it became evident they must proceed in single file, and therefore Mrs. Forster was compelled to relinquish the hand of her son, who soon fell back and joined his elder brother. For some distance the space between the rails of the tramway was frozen hard, so that walking on the crisp snow was tolerable, but afterward the ground became soft and slushy, and was much cut up by the feet of horses into deep holes between the rough wooden sleepers to which the iron angle rails were secured, and over these the little party travelled slowly and painfully, stumbling at every step.

The tramway had been recently worked, and the rails were not yet quite hidden by the light snow which had fallen. The footsteps of the stoker were also still visible, and once or twice a glimpse of his tall body surmounted by their luggage was caught where the road ran straight for any distance ; but as they advanced the course became more sinuous, and frequently crossed and re-crossed a running brook, which could be heard rippling close by beneath its crust of ice. The two boys fell gradually behind ; and in trying to find easier walking outside the rails on either side, they tripped against the jagged ends of the cross timbers, which were hidden by the snow, and floundered off the narrow embankments into the concealed ditches at the side in which the drift had accumulated, from whence they

gathered themselves up with rueful countenances, and returned as sadder and wiser little men to the beaten track in the centre. They were obliged to stop altogether occasionally to blow upon their half-frozen fingers, or to wipe away the tears which the sharp wind brought into their eyes. The elder lad, whose name was Robert, was frequently compelled to lay down his burden in order to help his weaker brother, who was three years his junior and of much slighter build, and who had been christened James after an uncle, who was said to have died abroad about the date of that event, but whose name, for some unexplained cause, was now never mentioned by the parents in the hearing of their children.

At length all traces of the stoker ahead of them were lost; his huge bulk was no longer visible through the gloom, and it was impossible to recognise his footsteps amongst those of the four-footed animals who had preceded him. Another tramway from some adjacent workings here joined that on which they had hitherto been travelling, and the additional traffic had evidently been recent and heavy, as the space between the rails was churned by the horses' feet into a mass of black, treacherous mud, slightly crusted over by the frost, mixed with snow, and full of deep holes and ruts.

To step from one cross-sleeper to another, about a yard apart, was now the only means of comfortable progress; both parents had tried the side-path with similar results to those experienced by their boys behind them, and once Mr. Forster, whose vision was

somewhat obscured by his burden, had a narrow escape from going right over into the brook, and was inwardly anathematizing the company, their servants, and all their works, especially that particular tramway and the "misbegotten fireman" who had persuaded him to venture thereon. That individual had probably reached his destination at the Dale Inn ere this, where no doubt he would be found imbibing any strong drink he could obtain in the "nature o' mayd-cine," provided he could persuade the strict landlady that his case was one of such pressing need as to warrant a special deviation from the ordinary rules of her temperance establishment.

By this time Mr. Forster in his annoyance had forgotten the parting instructions of the despised Jem Ritson as to "the pathway bearing to the left," and the "big yew" and the "forge pool," and coming suddenly on a wide sheet of water on the right hand, he did not observe that a narrow pathway led away on the other side from the foot of a large tree, which, being now covered with snow, did not strike him as belonging to any particular species, as it might have done at another season or in the daylight. This footpath, which really led to his destination in the Dale, was at present nearly invisible by reason of the snow, and unfortunately he passed it by unnoticed, followed by his weary family. The tramroad, on which they still proceeded, now wound round the edge of the water, on whose surface a thin covering of ice had formed. It was apparently a large reservoir retained by damming across the steep

valley through which the coals descended in trucks to the iron works in the lower and larger valley of the river "Lauter."

Their route was now absolutely dangerous, the tramway being carried on a high embankment with steep slopes, on the one side of which ran the rapid stream, of whose depth and size they were ignorant; on the other was the still, dark pool, with its treacherous covering of ice, evidently increasing in depth as they proceeded, and widening out rapidly towards the great dam below.

Here the tramway, being more exposed, had suffered most from the snow-storm. The central path was broken by a series of soft holes, into which they sank over the ankles; the cross-sleepers were round and slippery, and were fixed at irregular intervals.

Laden as he was, Mr. Forster stumbled and fell twice, barely saving his little daughter from injury at the risk of his own limbs. The boys had also "come to grief" more than once, especially the younger lad, one of whose short boots had got jammed under a cross-timber, and whose whimperings his father heard with anger behind him. Mrs. Forster returned to give the lads such assistance as she could, but the unfortunate boot could not be recovered, and she was reluctantly obliged to call to her husband for aid.

He placed the little girl on the driest spot he could find on the embankment, and then returned to the foundered party in the rear, and having groped in the wet mud for the missing boot until his hands were

soiled and bruised, at length discovered and extricated it.

By this time his overtaxed temper was roused, and the moaning of the boy, whose foot was wounded and cold, annoyed and irritated him, showing, as he thought, a want of that self-reliant manliness which it had been his principal object to instil into his children by precept and example.

He struck the boy heavily with the iron heel of the strong boot. "Don't, John! oh, don't!" said Mrs. Forster, rushing between them; "he has had no food for many hours, and is weak and cold; do not beat him now, for mercy's sake." His only answer was a muttered oath and a sharp request that she would go on and take charge of the little girl "Jenny," who, he said, "might fall over the bank into the water;" and seeing that he was assisting the boy to get his boot on again, and fearing also for her little daughter, left alone in the darkness, she hastily obeyed, and proceeded on in front with tears in her eyes, leading the child by the hand.

The little girl was thus enabled to walk with her tiny feet on the smooth iron rails, steadied by her mother, and balancing herself with much dexterity. She seemed to enjoy this mode of progress, and to appreciate the change to the maternal guardianship as a decided improvement. Presently they came to a narrow timber bridge, with a slight hand-rail at one side only, carrying the tramroad across the brook, which here fell into the reservoir over a stone weir,

and made a loud noise beneath, where, from the fall and rush of the water, the ice had not been able to form in the pool.

The child now crept closer to her mother's side, and nervously clutched her dress as they passed over.

The bridge was an old structure made of beams and open planks, through which the water could be seen as it fell white and hissing into the pool beneath.

There was no protection at the outer side next the reservoir, and the little girl's heart beat quickly whilst they crossed over, and for some distance beyond, where the tramroad made a sharp bend, and was evidently in better repair and more used by foot-passengers. Here there was a great post on the margin of the reservoir, from which a strange whirring and moaning noise proceeded. Mother and daughter stood still listening to this dismal melody, which at times rose high with the wind, like the loudest tones of an *Æolian* harp.

Meanwhile, the recovered boot, roughly cleared of mud and snow, had been forced on the cold foot of James Forster by his father.

The severe blow the lad received had an immediate and singular effect on him. He ceased to cry, and sullenly submitted to the operation, which was painful in the extreme in the present state of his foot. His brother remained standing near, grieved and silent; but, seeing Mr. Forster about to proceed, he said, in a hesitating voice, as if afraid to suggest anything,—

“Father! I think we've passed the yew-tree and the footpath the man spoke of. This must be the

forge pool. I hear hammering on the other side, as on an anvil, and there are sparks issuing from a chimney."

In an instant it dawned on Mr. Forster that the large dark tree with a canopy of snow which he had recently passed was the "big yew" of Jem Ritson, and, therefore, he knew they had unluckily missed the place at which they ought to have left the tramroad, and were now on a wrong track altogether.

"Why didn't you say so before, Robert?" he exclaimed in a tone of vexation. "Where's your mother gone to?" he inquired; and then, remembering she had proceeded on as directed, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Mary, come back—back at once!"

Mr. Forster had good lungs and a clear voice, and his wife and daughter, waiting beyond the wooden bridge, and curiously listening to the moaning noise which the inanimate post seemed to emit, heard him distinctly.

"Wait here, Jenny," said Mrs. Forster; "I'll go back to your father." And then, fearing some fresh calamity had happened to the boys, she hurried back rapidly over the bridge.

Left alone in the darkness so suddenly, in the vicinity of that strange wailing music, and still excited by the sight of the torrent under the old bridge, the little girl, who was about eight years of age, cowered down at the foot of the great post in fear. A new sound presently reached her quickened ear, and increased her

alarm ; it was the clanging beat of hammers on an anvil reverberating across the reservoir.

This noise had caught the ear of Robert Forster a little sooner, and led him to associate a “forge” and the “pool” before them, and the “large tree” they had passed, with the instructions given by Jem Ritson to find the pathway to the Dale. Again her father’s shout, “Come back, I say, come back,” rang out on the night, and echoed across the water. At the same moment a door opened in some hitherto unnoticed building at the other side of the wide pool, and a broad gleam of red light shone like a path of flame across the dark ice, and over the glistening snow at her feet.

This was the climax of her terror. Clasp ing her little hands to her ears to shut out these dreadful noises, the child ran madly back over the old slippery bridge in the direction in which she had seen her mother depart, and from whence her father’s voice proceeded. Flying along close to the outer edge of the slippery planks, when near the centre of the bridge her foot caught in some projecting ironwork, and she plunged with a great splash and a loud cry over the side into the dark water beneath.



CHAPTER II.

"THE FORGE POOL."

"He sunk ! The impetuous river rolled along,
The sullen wave betrayed his dying breath ;
And rising sad the rustling sedge among,
The gale of evening touched the chords of death."

KIRKE WHITE.

WHEN the sound of the great splash which accompanied the fall of the little girl into the water fell on the ears of the other members of the benighted family, scattered at slight distances apart on the tram-road, it needed no interval of time to convey to the mind of each one the nature of the disaster which had occurred. The despairing cry of the poor child, as she plunged headlong beneath the freezing waters of the deep pool, smote like a sharp sword through the hearts of the listeners.

The distracted mother, who was nearest to the scene of accident, fled back to the bridge in an instant, and on bended knees, convulsively clutching the slippery planks of the crazy structure, peered into the darkness beneath, with outstretched body and straining eyes. Her affrighted husband was beside her in another

moment, and with frenzied strength tore the timber handrail and stanchions from the other side of the old bridge, with the intention of obtaining some floating substance to aid in rescuing his child from the clutch of that dark and miserable water, whose troubled surface whirled round in eddies beneath him.

He glared down into its depths with the eager, ravenous intensity of a madman, in the hope of catching some stray glimpse of his darling, if but for a moment, in order that he might fling the long timber rail he had torn away within her grasp as she rose to the surface. He could not swim; but he would have plunged into the Maelström itself could he but see for an instant the precious object for which his starting eyeballs were in search. The dark shadow of the old bridge, and of the high banks on either side, rendered it all but impossible on such a night as this to discover anything distinctly on the surface of the water beneath. At one moment, when a mass of white foam wheeling in the eddy at the foot of the weir broke away from the outermost circle, and drifted slowly towards the edge of the sheet of ice beyond, he was on the point of dashing in headforemost, trusting to Providence for power to fight his way out again from those unknown but suspected depths; but, suddenly recognising the true nature of the object, he sprang to his feet, and uttered a wild cry in the direction of the forge at the other side of the pool, from the open door of which he had observed the broad beam of light emerge a minute previously.

“Help! help!” he shrieked; “light! help! for the love of God!”

At the same moment he saw the eldest boy standing beneath him, on the very edge of the water at the foot of the slope forming the abutment of the bridge, divested of cap and coat and vest, and bending forward. The other lad had just reached the top of the bank overhead, and was evidently uncertain whether he should descend to his brother or advance on the bridge to his parents. Suddenly the strong light which flashed from the open door of the forge opposite swept over the surface of the pool, and rested on the bridge, lighting up the agonising scene above and beneath, and gilding the tiny waves and hissing foam of the noisy little whirlpool. The next instant young Robert Forster sprang from the bank, and was seen for a second beneath the surface of the water as he plunged downwards with a surging splash, which smote on the mother’s ear like the death-knell of another member of her family. For a space, which seemed a lifetime to the parents, there was no object visible but the glistening water, resuming its whirling circles over the bodies of those for whom their heartstrings cracked. They held their very breath with painful tension. The father’s teeth were set deep in his nether lip, from which the blood oozed down his short grizzled beard, already glistening with white frosty beads. The mother’s fingers dug convulsively into the old planks as she strained her body at a perilous distance beyond the crazy platform from whence her child had fallen.

Suddenly, with an upward rush, like a bird from the depths, came the head and one arm of the brave lad, far out from the spot at which he had entered the water, and in dangerous proximity to the edge of the thin sheet of ice, whose margin they could distinctly trace in a sharp semicircle around him. The light from the forge door quivered for a moment on his form, and to those entranced gazers it was now apparent he bore the object of his search in the cold depths, tight clasped to his side with one arm, whilst he battled bravely against the current with the other. He was a good swimmer and a strong youth, and he faced round with a determined effort to reach the shore,—but, alas! he seemed to make no way in that direction, and his powerful strokes grew wilder and more rapid every moment.

Mr. Forster instantly launched the long wooden rail he had held poised until now, as near as he could safely do to the struggling youth, and then he tore from his own shoulders his long overcoat, and, placing his foot on one portion, rent it in strips from skirt to collar, and rapidly proceeded to knot the ends together as a rope to cast to the boy ere his strength became exhausted. When this hasty contrivance was completed, it was unfortunately discovered that it would do little beyond reaching from the platform of the bridge to the water beneath, and with maddening anguish Mr. Forster now saw that his children were being borne by the current to the edge of the ice, over which the boy flung one arm, raising to view with the other the

white face and tangled hair of his little sister, whom he was endeavouring to keep as high as possible out of the water, aided by the slippery support to which he clung. They could see his face turned in the direction of that broad ray of light with an anxious expression of eager hope, as if expecting help from the other side, whilst it was painfully evident he was being slowly drawn under the ice by the current beneath, notwithstanding his stoutest efforts. He made one attempt to raise himself on the edge of the thin ice, but it bent and cracked beneath his weight, and at length a wide piece on which his arm was extended parted from the remainder, and slid beneath, eluding his frantic clutch. He turned again towards the bridge, but his head was now deeper in the water, and his feet were seen planted for an instant against the edge of the firm portion of the sheet of ice beyond him; then with a last mighty effort he shot away from it, and threw his arm across the floating rail cast into the water by his father, which had been slowly drifting towards him. His position was a little better now, if he could only hold out, and endure that intense cold until help came; but he felt the chill grasp of death like a vice tightening close round his breast. At the first plunge he felt no cold at all, although the blood seemed to be driven suddenly to his heart. All physical feeling had been suspended from the instant in which he had caught sight of the little form of his sister drifting beneath the surface, lit up for a moment by that sudden glorious beam of light, until he had risen with her in

his grasp, after a dive which appeared to him like an eternity, in which an age of life seemed to pass through his brain, as he glanced upward from the dark depths to the bright glittering surface overhead. But now, there ran through his frame a shock like galvanism; his strong heavy boots, of which he could not divest himself at such short notice, felt like lead weights, a sudden spasmodic contraction of muscle shot through his left leg, and drew it up to his body, and like lightning flashed through his mind the dreadful terror of the stoutest swimmer's heart,—“*The Cramp!*”

As yet he had uttered no sound; his teeth were hard set in a deadly fight for life, and breath was too valuable to be wasted in cries; but now he began to fear that there was no hope, and that he must perish with his beloved sister. He felt the “undertow” of that strong current drawing him to certain death, like a stealthy hand beneath the ice. That deadly pang was spreading like paralysis from his lower limb up his left side, and clutching like a fiend at his stout heart. He thought with cruel mental agony, that those mute figures standing in helpless stony fixedness on the dry land were neglecting to do anything to rescue him. To him it appeared they might readily cling together and so reach one hand to save him, forming of their bodies a living chain to cross the narrow space between him and them. It seemed to be so easy to do, and yet so hopeless to be done. But ere he would yield up his brave spirit and face the dread unknown, he thought again unselfishly of her for whose

life he had risked his own, and in a clear firm tone his voice rang out on the night air,—“Father! Mother! James! I am going! save Jenny! I can do no more!”

Then he lifted her slight form across the sinking rail, so as to relieve the latter from his own weight; made one effort to shove it with its little burden towards the bank, and in the effort sank slowly backward beneath the surface of the water out of sight.

At the same instant there glided suddenly into the open space, lit up by that strong light, and emerging from the shadow of the steep bank beyond the bridge, a strange-shaped boat like a coffin, with square sides and flat bottom, surmounted by two upright posts, one at either end, like short masts capped by iron rollers.

Standing in the bow, and dexterously wielding a long boat-hook, with which she rapidly urged the boat from the bank towards the drowning child, was a tall lithe girl apparently about seventeen years of age, with handsome features and coal-black hair, which fell over her neck in a tangled mass. Her strong arms were bared to the shoulders, and her dark eyes flashed with excitement as the light fell on her face. The strange craft shot out so rapidly between the watchers on the bridge and the poor child on the floating spar, that there was not time for any of the party to speak to this wild-looking stranger, ere they saw her stoop suddenly, and almost in the same instant the parents beheld the body of their child lifted by the girl over

the edge of the boat. Another figure was now observed seated in the stern, as it emerged into the beam of red light still streaming over the pool. It was that of a dark man with broad shoulders and a large shaggy head begrimed with smoke. In his hands he held a long flat paddle, which he drove deep into the water at each powerful stroke.

“Canna’ thee see t’other one?” he shouted in a harsh strong voice, and in the dialect of the district; “drop the child i’ the cobble, and tackle un wi’ the boat-hook, lass, or he’s food for the jacks.”

The young girl hurriedly placed the child on the flat bottom of the boat, and plunged her long boat-hook into the water near the spot at which they had seen Robert Forster disappear. “Howd thee hand down, lass,” he cried; “howd thee hand down!” whilst she moved it rapidly round and round in the water in search of the youth, but without success. Then she looked back to the man in the stern with a distressed aspect, and shook her head. “Gie it me, lass!” he said hurriedly, “gie it me!” and, with two or three strokes of his paddle, he brought the end of the boat in which he sat over the place where the boy had sunk, and seized the long pole, which was shod with a formidable iron hook. He peered closely into the water for a moment, and then thrust the instrument away as far as he could reach under the ice, against which the stern of the boat had been impelled, sweeping it rapidly from side to side.

Presently he seemed to touch something, and shouted

again, "Keep her steady, lass! steady! sit down I tell thee! he's away wi' the stream agin!" He now struck the thin ice in front of the boat several rapid blows with the iron-shod end of the pole, and drew the craft forward into the opening thus made, by hooking on to the firm sheet beyond. Again he probed the dark depths beneath in the direction of the current, his swarthy face lit up with the excitement, and his broad forehead knit into deep furrows. He suddenly made a rapid short stroke at something deep under water, and then he commenced cautiously and steadily to haul in the boat-hook hand over hand.

The girl had taken the body of the little child on her lap, and parted the wet tangled hair from the forehead. She pressed her hand over the child's heart, but there was no responsive beat; she placed her ear to the cold, colourless lips, but no sound or breath came forth to intimate that life still clung to its frail tenement. The eyes were open, but were fixed and glassy, and the fingers were tight shut upon the palms of the hands.

Suddenly the stranger pressed her warm lips on those of the inanimate child, and gently breathed her hot breath into the lungs half charged with water. After a few respirations she stopped and listened intently at those voiceless portals from which life had apparently fled, and then sadly shook her head as she glanced round at the parents on the bridge, who were kneeling with hands uplifted to the dark sky overhead, praying for the success of her efforts.

“Oh! try again, young woman,” said Mrs. Forster in despairing tones, “and Heaven will bless you.”

“She has not been long in the water,” said her husband; “try again, my good girl, for the love of God.”

Once more the lips of that dark, coal-stained, gipsy-looking creature were fastened on the white small mouth of the unconscious child; she breathed a long full breath into the little form now resting all limp and clammy on her knees, and drew back the air again into her own broad chest—her dark long hair enveloping the fair head of the little girl, as if to hide the mystery of the life-giving operation from the straining eyes of the distracted parents, almost jealous in their wild excited love of the good-natured efforts being made to restore their beloved child to consciousness, in which they were unable to assist in the slightest degree.

For three or four minutes that poor, untaught girl, with the instinct of her sex, did for the half-drowned child the only thing which could revive into a flame the flickering embers of its feeble life, and that which probably the most skilled surgeon in England would have shrunk from or hesitated to do, except for his own offspring, until at length those cold little hands unclasped, and instinctively clutched themselves again more tightly round the girl’s neck; those fixed eyelids closed slowly on the glazed eyeballs, to reopen with the gentle look of life therein; the child’s breast heaved with a great sigh, a faint tinge of colour stole back to her white lips, and there came, borne faintly on the night air, to the enraptured ears of those two

tortured beings on the old bridge, a feeble cry of "Mother! mother!"

At the same moment as the girl raised her head, and flung back the dark hair which had fallen over her face, she saw the body of young Robert Forster lifted over the side of the boat by her father, and laid along the flat bottom in the stern. The body fell with a dull heavy sound on the rough boards, face downwards, and apparently lifeless. "Back wi' 'em to the bridge, lass," he said, as he resumed his paddle and speedily shot the craft to the foot of the slope where James Forster stood waiting.

Both parents now rapidly descended the sloping bank to the spot where their younger boy stood; he had seized the bow of the boat, into which Mr. Forster leapt at once, snatching his little daughter from the arms of the strange girl who had so skilfully brought her back to life, and covering her wet face with kisses.

The mother followed him immediately, and pointing silently to the apparently lifeless form at the other end of the boat, took possession of the little girl, who suddenly relapsed into a semi-conscious state, although, as Mrs. Forster strained her to her breast, she could feel the slight ebbing pulse of her heart, and on her cheek the flickering breath which told that life was still trembling in that cold, listless little frame.

Her husband raised the body of the boy, and drew his head upon his knees; but the youth's features were fixed and rigid, and although a faint smile seemed to linger round the mouth, there was neither pulse nor

breath. Mr. Forster turned anxiously to the boatman to ask assistance, and for the first time observed that the latter was a singular cripple, apparently without any lower limbs, unless such stumps as were concealed in a sort of leather saddle or cushion in which he sat, which was suspended by long straps from his shoulders. His arms were long and powerful, and reached to the ground; and by means of them, and two small wooden stools or rockers, which he grasped in his strong hands, he managed to swing himself close to the boy, and placed his large hand on the region of the heart, thrusting it beneath the shirt, and feeling over the boy's breast with the air of a professional adept.

"We mun go to the forge, Bessie," he said; "the lad's nigh gone. In wi' ye," he exclaimed abruptly to James Forster, who was holding the head of the boat to the bank, and who instantly obeyed the command. The cripple then swung himself back to his perch in the stern, and seizing his long paddle, impelled the boat back by the same route along the edge of the bank where there was open water, through which she had been brought so providentially to the spot, in the nick of time, by the strong arms of this strange-looking man and his daughter. The latter resumed her pole, and drove the boat rapidly onward by shoving from the bottom, until they reached the wooden post on the edge of the pool, which had been partly the innocent cause of the disaster. Here they now observed a thick iron wire strained across the water from this post to another similar stout upright at the other side near

the forge, from the door of which had suddenly streamed the strong light, now evidently dying away.

The iron was hung with tiny icicles, and the sharp breeze cutting through these, and across the tightened wire, caused the strange weird note which had previously appeared to Mrs. Forster and her child to issue from the post itself, and so unfortunately checked their progress. The sound rose and fell with the wind, and sometimes resembled the wail of a human voice, at others the loud whirr of machinery in motion; and no doubt many of my readers who have come suddenly on the telegraph wires and poles of the present day in frosty weather, under a fresh breeze in the open country, have been puzzled by similar strains. The use of the wire in the present instance was at once apparent; the girl hitched it under the pullies attached to the fixed uprights in the boat, and then seizing the wire in her hands, impelled the clumsy craft rapidly across the deep pool, which had apparently not been allowed to freeze here, as there was a narrow channel formed by the passage of the boat to and fro in this rude ferry fashion, then and still in use on many parts of the river Severn.

The strong crippled man in the boat's stern, which was now driven first, and did not differ much in shape from the other end, still plied his long paddle, and in a few minutes they touched a rude landing-place on the opposite bank, from which a footpath led up to the open door of the forge.

Up this path the strange boatman swung himself with surprising speed, and disappeared into his dwell-

ing, calling to the rest of the party to follow him—a behest which they instantly obeyed.

Mr. Forster carried the head and the girl the feet of the unconscious youth, assisted by the younger son, whose tears now flowed freely over that which he believed to be his brother's dead body. Mrs. Forster followed with the little girl wrapped in her cloak, and thus the melancholy procession entered beneath the low threshold of the hovel known in the neighbourhood as "The Gipsy's Forge."



CHAPTER III.

LAUTERDALE

“In lowly dale, fast by a river’s side,
With woody hill o’er hill encompass’d round.”

THOMSON.

THE valley through which flows the little river Lauter to join the fair Severn, and hide its coal-stained waters in the bosom of the larger current, has been the seat of the manufacture of iron ever since the time of the Romans, the remains of whose “workings” are still to be traced in the adjacent hills, and the foundations of whose massive furnaces, on the river bank lower down, attest the magnitude of their operations at a time when their great northern highway led through the villas and streets of Uriconium.

Old Roman implements—spear-heads, fibulæ, and coins—are still found amongst the cinder-heaps which disfigure an otherwise beautiful part of England, and often in the upper levels of the neighbouring coal-mines the old driftways of those active conquerors seriously impede the larger and later operations of their successors, and lead to much perplexity and cloudy thought on the part of the colliers, which no

amount of the good Dale home-brewed beer, always resorted to on such occasions, seems to render any clearer.

The art of brewing appears to have gone hand-in-hand everywhere with the art of smelting, as if nature required some potent beverage to slake the human clay exposed for hours to the fierce heat of mighty furnaces, and long before those twin leviathans, Bass and Alsopp, had erected their huge establishments on the Trent, the beer of Lauterdale had acquired a wide reputation, and exercised a somewhat beneficial influence in keeping at a distance more fiery and exciting liquors, which previous to the time I write of were almost unknown and uncared for amongst the great bulk of the workmen.

Some few instances of drunkenness had recently occurred amongst the lower class of artisans on Saturday nights and holidays, and had caused no small scandal in the Dale, especially as it was strongly suspected that the raw spirit which rapidly intoxicated the men had been distilled and sold at no very distant spot. But no one had yet ventured to say where lay the precise locality of the illicit manufacture, notwithstanding a considerable reward offered for its discovery by the proprietors of the Dale ironworks, who were themselves strict teetotallers, as were their fathers before them, but who did not in any other way than by personal example inculcate total abstinence upon the workmen or their families.

For more than a century the iron and coal works of Lauterdale, extending over a great breadth of country

and for several miles up the valley, had been in the hands of a great Quaker family, who worked them in a steady, jog-trot fashion, without availing themselves much of the march of science, but still on sound business principles, giving short credit to others and requiring none themselves; a course which had invariably led to increasing wealth, and involved few bad debts amongst their numerous customers.

Not far from Lauterdale the first attempt was made to construct a steam-engine of any size; and yet all the principal collieries in the neighbouring Black Country were drained by the powerful Cornish engines of Boulton and Watt before the cautious ironmasters of the Dale had made up their minds to invest in so expensive and new-fangled a machine, about whose ways there seemed to them to be something appertaining to the powers of darkness.

At Lauterdale appeared the first iron rails ever laid in England, on which small coal-trucks were transported to the riverside by simple gravitation more than two hundred years ago; and yet, long previous to the time of which I write, the heads of the firm had met and consulted and separated many times in indecision on the question of allowing the new railway to be extended from Brightmoor to their works in the Dale below, and at length had determined to hold fast by their well-worn tramway and stout horses for at least one generation longer.

Thus it came to pass that the "Dale Company," as they were called, possessed more old-fashioned machinery,

and a more antiquated class of artisans, than any other firm in England, and were decidedly falling behind the age and in need of reform.

The workmen in the Company's service differed materially in one respect from their brethren in other manufacturing districts. The wages received by them were much lower on the average than were paid elsewhere at the period ; and yet, strange to say, the men were far more contented than better-paid hands, because there were no "slack times" and no "strikes." Steady men were never discharged, and "strange hands," "tramps," or "delegates," seldom ventured into the district, which was somewhat isolated from the great central coal-field of England.

Each man with a family held a small cottage under the Company at a moderate rent, dependent for "tenant-right" more on his good behaviour and sobriety than upon punctual payment of his rent.

I wish it could be said that these cottages were healthy, or properly adapted to the people who were obliged to live in them ; but as a rule they were wretchedly constructed, at a period when everything beyond mere shelter and warmth was deemed superfluous.

As yet no regular hospital existed in Lauterdale, although severe injuries were of frequent occurrence, because of the clumsy machinery in use ; and fevers were prevalent at all seasons, as sanitary precautions were practically ignored.

Pigs were allowed to exist in sties close to the doors

of such of the inhabitants as desired to keep them, and the little river Lauter was polluted with the drainage of the whole district; so that in some places low down in the valley, where the population was dense, it was actually an open sewer.

Schools had been built for children and infants, but any advanced education of the people had hitherto been discouraged on principle, as a thing tending to make them discontented and troublesome.

Good water was very scarce, and was in little request; but beer was allowed to be brewed in each cottage, under certain limitations, and formed the staple drink of the people, including the children, whom it was believed to strengthen, and for whom it probably was better than the doubtful fluid to be had from the wells.

The sale of intoxicating spirits of every kind was absolutely prohibited within the territory owned by the Company, which embraced a population of about ten thousand souls, about one-third of whom were actually engaged in the ironworks and collieries.

On religious matters there was perfect toleration and equality; the greater part of the workmen and their families were Dissenters. The proprietors of the works, and most of their principal clerks and officials, were members of the Society of Friends, who made no converts on principle, but twice a week threw the doors of their large "Meeting-house" wide open to all comers, and received those who ventured in with courteous, grave civility; but it does not appear that many persons

availed themselves of the opportunities thus afforded them.

Occasionally an open-air address was delivered by itinerant members of the Society, who appeared at long intervals, clad in sober drab, with spotless linen and broad beaver. They were listened to attentively by the workmen, more out of respect for the ruling powers than admiration for the zealous preachers, who reasoned like Paul "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," and then went their way for a season to edify some other community.

There were many dissenting chapels, of divers denominations—those of the Wesleyans being most numerous; and a large, handsome Gothic edifice was approaching completion on the hillside, at the date of which I write, intended for the worshippers of the Established Church, hitherto unprovided for.

About this new church many strange stories were rife amongst the "Dale folk," and it was hinted that its erection had been the cause of trouble and dissension between the two Brothers, who were now the last male representatives of the old family which had ruled in Lauterdale through successive generations for at least two centuries. These Brothers were known wherever iron and coals were sold in England, by their oft-recurring family names of Joshua and Jediah Field, trading under the name and style of the Lauterdale Company. They were at this period both advanced in life, although there was considerable difference in years between them, and the elder brother Joshua lay

dangerously ill in the Dale House on the night in which this story opens.

The relations between the ironmasters of Lauterdale and their workpeople had hitherto partaken much of the patriarchal character. The men looked up to the heads of the old firm as to superior beings, endowed with great wealth, and in whom was vested the right of mining for coal and iron for the special purpose of employing a vast number of workmen, who had a clear claim on them for regular employment and wages.

The masters took a similar view of their responsibilities, and felt it incumbent on them to carry on the works and provide employment for the men in good times and bad times alike, so that whether trade was brisk or dull it made little difference. When iron could be sold at a profit, it was sold and delivered; when the price fell beneath the actual cost of manufacture, which it often did, it was held back from the market and accumulated in vast piles to wait for better prices; and to go on steadily increasing the stock during many successive years was by no means unusual.

It was not to be wondered at, then, that the paternal government which had its head-quarters in the Dale House was looked on with great respect, as one of more importance to the district than that other distant Government represented by the local tax-collector and a few policemen, whose duties were chiefly confined to inquiries as to the ownership of stray dogs and a regular exhibition of uniform on market days.

There is always something interesting in an old mansion which has been connected with the history of a family for a long period. Its associations appear to exercise a subtle influence on the characters of those who, like the Fields, have resided under the same roof, all their lives following closely in the footsteps of revered predecessors, and insensibly inheriting or acquiring the virtues and failings of their forefathers, whose portraits look down on them from the walls like silent monitors. As a rule, Friends at that period did not approve of portraits in their houses, but the founder of the family had no such prejudice, and was exhibited at full length standing by an anvil and leaning on a huge sledge-hammer, the background being relieved by forked flames issuing from clouds of smoke. His successors had followed his example, and thus formed a goodly array of bygone ironmasters, without the suggestive adjuncts of the original picture. In other respects, the series might be inspected in vain for any varying types of character.

They had also been gallant enough to hand down to posterity the likenesses of their wives, but it was marvellous how they all came to be so much alike. The secret of the similarity probably lay in the Quaker dress, which had altered little or nothing since the days of Penn, that great leader of the sect about whose principles such varying opinions have been held ever since Lord Macaulay unwisely stirred up the controversy.

Through all the male portraits there ran over the

high foreheads the same rigid lines of thought, and there was visible the same firm massive outline of jaw devoid of beard or whisker, softened away by a wax-like smoothness of pale cheeks, and lit up by the benevolence of large ox-like eyes, shining forth in goodness under a canopy of bushy eyebrow.

The female portraits were like those of so many wax figures at Madame Tussaud's, arrayed in the whitest and stiffest cambric, and encased as to the body in high stiff corsets of pearl-grey silk; but at either side of the great fire-place in the dining-hall appeared some new faces of a different type, evidently the last painted in the collection, and of a recent date; one being that of a young woman of exquisite beauty, clad in a light blue robe trimmed with snowy ermine, displaying an amount of swelling bosom and white shoulders enough to bring the stiff old ladies portrayed in the adjacent pictures right out of their frames with astonishment.

Rich auburn curls of the true tint, which seems alternately to absorb and reflect light at every turn, fell in heavy masses on her fair neck and clustered round a forehead which recalled the exquisite head of Clytie, in splendid contrast with the square outlines of the prim dames around, disfigured as they were by ugly caps and smoothly banded hair.

The eyes of this lady were deep blue, large, and lustrous, and the artist had caught in them a saddened far-reaching gaze, as if the soul within looked forth from amidst that gloomy company on some happier distant scene.

Beneath this picture was hung another containing two smaller portraits of a boy and girl taken at an early age. The brown locks of the former were cut square across the forehead in the quaint fashion seen in the pictures of Holbein and lately revived in England; the features of the girl were like those of her mother portrayed above, but the child's flowing tresses had been allowed to grow as nature meant them in golden wavy curls.

The portrait on the other side of the fire-place was that of the lady's husband, who was not represented in the Quaker dress; it was the likeness of a man in the prime of life, with an eager intelligent face, dark eyes and hair, and yet it bore stray points of family resemblance to the line of placid men, whose eyes seemed to look askance at this descendant, who had been the first to leave the straight and narrow paths of the sect in which the Fields had walked for generations.

He was the only son of the old man whose laboured breathing in the chamber overhead told of approaching dissolution, and, alas! he had gone before on the path through the dark valley so soon to be trodden by his father, having been lost at sea some years previously, when on a distant voyage, under painful circumstances.

In the carefully kept burying-ground of the Friends, not far from the Dale House itself, were two green mounds having one iron tablet between them, the only memorial visible in that place of grassy quiet graves, on which was written the simple inscription—

RACHEL FIELD,
AND HER ONLY SON
ROBERT FLETCHER FIELD,
REST HERE IN THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE.

And from that lonely resting-place, to the little wicket in the garden-wall, there was trodden a narrow path, on which for three years past, until this last fatal illness, might be seen once every day at eventime the stately form of the old ironmaster pacing slowly to the same spot at the foot of that simple memorial, where he would stand for a long time in silent meditation, and then as quietly steal back to his own solitary room.

There were two other members of the family who resided with the elder brother. His sister, Rebecca Field, who was an elderly lady and a great invalid, much absorbed in religious meditation ; she had at one time managed the domestic arrangements, after the death of Mr. Field's wife, but now rarely conversed with any one, except that at long intervals, when "moved by the spirit," she would burst forth suddenly at the meetings of the Society, which she still attended, in exalted strains, like one "who had been within the veil and had seen the glory."

"With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,
Enrichèd with ancestral merchandise,
And for them many a weary hand did smelt
In torch-lit mines and noisy factories."

There was also Mr. Joshua Field's grand-daughter, Esther Field, the surviving child of his lost son, who

had been his constant companion for some years past, and was the sole representative of the family in the new generation. She was at this time an interesting child about ten years of age, being the original of the small portrait before referred to ; and, as my readers will have future opportunities of making her acquaintance, I defer any further notice of the little lady at present.



CHAPTER IV.

THE DALE HOUSE.

“The rich man built a house, both large and high ;
He enter'd in and sat him down to sigh ;
He planted ample woods and gardens fair,
And walk'd with anguish and compunction there.”

CRABBE.

TO understand the manner of life of the Messrs. Field, and certain events which I shall have to narrate later on, it is necessary here to describe the “Dale House,” as it was called, in which the brothers were born and had resided all their lives.

It had been originally designed by a foreign architect, in the time of Dutch William, and looked like a wing lopped off from Hampton Court Palace, and dropped on the hillside overlooking the ironworks in the valley beneath, yet far enough removed from them to escape the evil effects of the smoke.

The edifice was built of those small red bricks formerly imported from Holland, to the durability of which many of our old manor-houses owe their long existence. The windows and doors had white stone dressings, with carved keystones. The sashes were

mostly formed with the stout bars and small squares of the period in which the house was erected, but in some of the principal rooms these had been removed and replaced by modern casements. The basement story contained many vaults and strong rooms, in which it was popularly believed were deposited large sums of gold and silver, the accumulated savings of several generations of thrifty and industrious men, representing in the precious metals the post bills and notes which the present firm circulated to a considerable extent as bankers in the district, under the name of the "Lauterdale Bank," the paper of which, even when stained and torn, was preferred, for miles around, to the crisp, white notes of hand of Mr. Matthew Marshall, although issued with the sanction and approval of the Old Lady in Threadneedle Street herself.

No wood was used throughout the mansion but the best of English oak, and this had evidently been used with an unsparing hand, and carefully selected by the builders.

Entering the large central hall, the visitor was struck at once with the strength of the great beams which supported its roof, and with the beauty of the rich, dark wainscot of the walls and the polished panels of the lofty ceiling.

There was not much carving, but such as had been executed was simple in character, highly wrought, and strictly confined to floral forms, as "the likeness of any thing living in heaven above or the earth beneath, or

the waters under the earth," was not permitted to appear in the dwelling-houses of "Friends."

The floor of this hall was laid in alternating squares of dark and white marble, banded with red porphyry, and from its centre sprang a white stone staircase, branching in wide curves right and left to the corridors and chambers above.

A large dining-hall at the back, with a handsome library over it, had been added by the father of the present owners, but the house was, in other respects, curiously duplicated on both sides of the great entrance-hall, and might be occupied by two separate families, and indeed had been frequently so occupied in past times, without interference or inconvenience.

The right-hand suite of rooms was at present in the joint possession of the elder brother, Joshua, who had been married, and of his sister Rebecca. The apartments on the left were tenanted by Mr. Jediah Field, who was an old bachelor, and with whom lived the chief cashier and book-keeper of the firm, Josiah Morris, a very important person in this story, and one who had been intimately connected with the affairs of the Company for many years.

"*The three Beavers*," as they were called, had lived within these walls for a considerable portion of their lives in peace and harmony, but from causes which will be fully explained later on, the two brothers had been totally estranged for some years past, and the only communication ever held between them on business or other matters was by means of their trusted

cashier, who was a tall, thin man, with silvery white hair and a considerable stoop, and at this period approaching sixty years of age.

The chief books and ledgers of the firm were kept by this individual, and were written like copper-plate throughout, under the general supervision of Jediah Field, who himself wrote all the more important business letters, in a hand which was the envy of his correspondents.

The elder brother, Joshua, had managed the external concerns of the Company for thirty years, and during that period had possessed exclusive control over the workmen. He was a larger and more robust man than Jediah, and his constant open-air exercise and active habits, frequently involving many hours in the saddle daily, had tended to his physical development; whilst the sedentary life of the younger brother had had the opposite effect, so that the latter had grown somewhat withered and shrunken, like a winter apple, but it was found by those who did business with him that he still retained all the mental vigour and acuteness of his youth, sharpened by the experience of a busy life.

Jediah Field was harsh and incisive in manner, especially whenever he thought any one was not strictly accurate, or was unnecessarily wasting his time, of which he carefully husbanded every minute. In religious matters he was one of the straitest and most consistent of the members of the Society of Friends, and was a vigorous defender of their tenets

and practices, at that period often fiercely assailed by clergymen of the Established Church, to which he bore a determined hostility.

These reverend controversialists found him no mean opponent, as he was a critical scholar, profoundly read in the Hebrew Bible, which was his constant study; he was also an ardent collector of old books, and had accumulated a valuable library, in arranging which he spent most of his evenings after business hours, often in the company of his chief clerk, who had taken up the subject of astronomy as a private hobby of his own, but was always to be found in the same apartment as his friend and employer when the nights were unsuitable for his starry observations.

The cashier carried on these latter in an old tower, situated on an eminence behind the house, which he had been permitted by the brothers to convert into an observatory. Here he had erected his scientific instruments and telescopes, and was accounted amongst *savans* as a painstaking and reliable observer of the heavenly bodies, in whose motions and transits his soul delighted.

Josiah Morris was also a strict member of the Society of Friends, but divested of the narrow prejudices which disfigured the character of Jediah Field. He had been married in early life, but with the circumstances of his married life no one was believed to be acquainted; and he volunteered no information, although otherwise he was by no means a reserved man in ordinary intercourse.

There was one science, then in its infancy, to which both these men were much devoted, and the pursuit of which afforded them the only open-air exercise they allowed themselves. They were both ardent geologists, and had jointly accumulated a considerable collection of specimens and fossils. These they had arranged and classified in one of the large rooms at their side of the establishment, often labouring together in this work very late into the night. They were thus industriously converting a portion of the large residence into a valuable museum and library, from which at present no one but themselves derived any benefit.

The chief offices of the company were attached to the dwelling-house at the side occupied by Jediah Field and the cashier, and were entered from one of the lower rooms by a short corridor. These offices were modern buildings, designed and erected by the brothers for the specialities of their business, and were fitted with long lines of desks and enclosures for their numerous clerks. There were also three private rooms communicating with each other, over the doors of which were inscribed respectively the names of Joshua Field, Jediah Field, and Josiah Morris; but the elder brother, Joshua, had not entered these offices for a long period, and would now never cross the threshold again.

Whilst Mr. Forster and his unhappy family were suffering many things on that cold December Saturday night in endeavouring to reach their destination, Jediah Field and his cashier were comfortably seated in high-backed leather-cushioned chairs in the library of the

Dale House, in front of a large fire of coals surmounted by a huge log of beech, which hissed and sputtered in the flame. They were solemnly discussing the circumstances of his appointment, and the altered arrangements which his presence would entail in the present system of management.

"Our friend John Brown speaks well of the skill of the man and of his great energy," said the ironmaster. "I hope the step we are taking will prove a wise one, and will tend to the benefit of the business and the welfare of those committed to our charge; but I am much exercised in mind at so great a trust being committed for the first time to a stranger. How does it appear to thee, Josiah, from thy point of view?"

Josiah knew very well that the "point of view" referred to was the position he held between the brothers as one fully in the confidence of both, and that he was expected to give the ideas of the elder brother, Joshua, so far as he knew them, and not his own, in reply.

"Truly," he replied, after a few moments' pause, "it is a serious experiment, and will require much careful watching on our part; but I believe it cannot be avoided. We have tarried long behind the trade, and must needs seek assistance, even from the stranger at our gates, to overtake those who have passed us by in the race. But, nevertheless," he continued more cheerfully, "our tarrying has not been without profit. We shall have the advantage of much previous costly experience in this man, and it was well that our friend

and correspondent could spare him to our use. Thy brother is anxious to see him, in order that he may place his great charge in his hands in a becoming manner; and, indeed, since he hath consented to lay it down, I think his mind is relieved of much anxiety. Perchance, also, his heart is somewhat softened regarding thee."

Here he ceased speaking for awhile, and then, laying his hand on his friend's knee, said earnestly, "I would, Jediah, that thou hadst some kindly speech with Joshua to-night. I fear much it will not be for long that the opportunity will be given thee."

"Didst thou deliver him my message?" inquired Jediah, after a long interval of silent communion with himself. "Is he still in the gall of bitterness?"

"Yes," replied the cashier, "I have spoken to Joshua as thou wouldst have me, and he has listened with patience; but were I in thy place, Jediah, I would see thy brother once more face to face ere he goes hence to be no more seen. This severe weather tries him much, and the physicians look grave as they pass from his chamber: perchance the good Lord may call him this night, and then thou wouldst regret that no word was spoken between him and thee ere he departed. Forgive me if I use my freedom of speech overmuch on this occasion, but it hath been borne in upon me, and I cannot hold my peace."

There was a long silence after this exhortation, and the loud ticking of the clock on the mantelshelf could be heard distinctly for five minutes. At the end of

that time Jediah Field rose slowly, and said, without emotion, "It shall be even as thou wilt, Josiah. Go and inquire if he will see me now, and if it be permitted I shall come at once. I would speak with him alone, if he has no objection."

As he spoke, the door at the farther end of the library opened slowly, after some little struggle on the part of the intruder with the lock, and a fair-haired child entered the room and came timidly towards the two men, now standing in the strong light of the fire. She held out her hand to the elder one, and said, in a low sweet voice, "Uncle Jediah, thou art to come at once to grandfather's room; he has sent me for thee; and—" she added, looking up appealingly with her blue eyes to the cashier, who was gazing earnestly on her face, "he is very ill indeed."

Jediah Field raised the child in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

"Yes, Esther," he said, "I shall come directly."

Then he turned one instant to his friend and counsellor, and, bowing his head, proceeded slowly to the other side of the house, in which was situated the sick man's chamber, the little girl leading him thither by the hand.



CHAPTER V.

THE FORGE.

“A burning cauldron stood in the midst,
The flame was fierce and high ;
And all the cave so wide and long,
Was plainly seen thereby.”

KIRKE WHITE.

THE scene which the Forsters beheld on entering the old forge was wild and singular ; the interior was much larger than the external appearance of the hut would have led any one to imagine ; the cliff at the back, against which the roof rested, and to which the side walls were made good, being excavated into a sort of cave, in the sides of which the outcrop of the coal measures was distinctly visible, the seams running in broad, oblique bands across the excavation, portions of which were concealed by suspicious-looking rush-mats, hung by iron pins to the rough face of the rock. These mats really covered private “workings” in the face of the coal, used by the present occupier of the forge for his own purposes ; he had thus a supply of fuel close to hand at no cost beyond his own labour.

A portion of the hut was separated by partitions into

sleeping and living rooms, the remainder being ostensibly the "*forge*" itself, in which the party was now assembled.

In the centre of this apartment stood a low, wide smith's hearth, on which a large fire of sulphurous coals, such as are generally found at the outcrop of coal-fields, was fiercely burning. This caused a suffocating vapour, which seemed to prefer escape by the open door instead of exit by the wide chimney-shaft provided for it. The cause of its preference for the former was evidently the fact that the chimney was at present blocked up by a huge iron-covered vessel, suspended over the fire by strong chains. In this vessel some fluid was in a violent state of ebullition, judging from the gurgling sounds and occasional jets of steam which were emitted. From the lid of the cauldron there ran a wide funnel-shaped iron pipe, leading away behind the hearth. One side of the fireplace was protected by a small brick wall, through which came the "tuyer," or blast-pipe, of a large smith's bellows, the "rock-staff" of which hung in front. To the iron pipe first mentioned, at some distance from the hearth, was attached another made of copper, smaller in diameter, but twisted into numerous convolutions, and technically called "the worm." It rested at this moment in a long wooden trough half filled with water. Over this trough was suspended a narrow wooden shoot, which entered the forge from without through a hole in the wall, and from which flowed a continuous stream of cold, clear water on the twisted "worm" beneath. At the ex-

treme end of the worm-pipe appeared a large earthen jar, into which the hot fluid distilled drop by drop, and from which issued the strong pungent odour of fresh raw spirit. The peculiar smell, and the appearance of the apparatus above described, which Mr. Forster took in at a single glance, convinced him at once that the place was being then used as an "illicit distillery" for the manufacture of spirits—a kind of thing of which he had heard, but never before witnessed. Close to the hearth was a large, shallow, circular wooden vessel, half full of a steaming liquid; this was the boiling "wort" from which the still over the fire was supplied.

A man who had been recently assisting in the operation in progress suddenly disappeared at a given signal, and the crippled boatman alone stood, or, more properly speaking, sat in his saddle close by the side of the large vessel on the floor, waiting for the entrance of the sad procession, bearing the apparently lifeless form of Robert Forster.

As they entered his premises, the cripple slowly raised his open right hand over his head, and pointing with the other to the ground near his feet, said in a firm voice, "Lay him down."

He was instantly obeyed by the astonished supporters. He then continued in a solemn tone, looking Mr. Forster in the face: "I've brought thee here to save t' lad's loife, if it's in 'im. Swear to me, all of ye, ower his body, thet ye wunna tell man or woman or child what ye see here t'night."

Mr. Forster laid his hand on the youth's breast, and

said, "*I swear solemnly never to divulge what I see being done in this place.*"

He had taken in at a glance the nature of the work, and the reason for the strange oath required of him; but his wife did not so readily comprehend the scene, and evidently feared she was about to witness some unholy rite, from which, as a good Christian woman, she shrank with fear.

The strange girl understood her hesitation at once, and placed Mrs. Forster's hand on the cold forehead of the boy: "Swear as he wishes," she said hurriedly, in a hoarse whisper, "swear t'ould man, if you wish to save the lad's life."

The poor frightened woman, thus urged, murmured in a hesitating voice, "I swear!" and looked appealingly to the impassive cripple, who waited for the words ere he began the work of restoration.

He glanced at James Forster next, who said hastily, "I swear as father did."

And then the strange man rolled his blackened shirt-sleeves up to the shoulders, and thrust one arm into the hot liquor in the large vessel beside him. The temperature seemed higher than he expected, as he immediately withdrew his bare arm with a wince, and signified in a strange language to his daughter to do something or other in the direction of the still-worm behind them. In an instant the girl shifted the end of the wooden spout over the large vessel on the floor, round which they all stood, and a stream of clear cold water flowed into the hot liquid. The cripple waited

a little while, and then tested the temperature again in the same manner once or twice with his large right hand, until it seemed to suit his purpose. He then directed them to raise the body, and immerse it, half-dressed as it was, in the vessel; the feet hanging over one side, and the head resting on the other. He now proceeded to move the boy's stiff arms rapidly up and down, occasionally plunging them in the liquid, and shaking the passive form of the youth from side to side as he did so; but for a time no beneficial effect was apparent—Robert Forster's light frame still lay listless and helpless in the man's strong arms.

The cripple now paused, and looked anxiously at the boy's white face, and then drew the body up so as to immerse the lower limbs also in the hot bath, and so held it for a few moments in a sitting posture, aided by Mr. Forster—all three being enveloped in steam from the large vessel, and from the clothes of the youth, now saturated with hot water.

Hitherto Robert Forster's eyes were closed, and the lids sunken. The cripple suddenly pointed at them through the steam, and Mr. Forster, on his knees beside him, immediately looked up, and perceived the boy's eyes had opened, and were staring fixedly in front amidst the dense vapour around him.

The next instant the lad moved his head slowly round, and looked in a dreamy way at his mother, who was still holding the little girl in her arms, and intently watching the proceedings, whilst her lips moved in earnest prayer for the success of their efforts.

A grim smile broke over the large, rough visage of the cripple. He noticed the direction of Robert Forster's glance, and said kindly to the mother, "Put the little 'un in wi' the lad, duds and a',"—a request which Mrs. Forster instantly complied with, as there was ample space for both in the wide tub.

The girl now brought a tin vessel, with which she baled the hot liquid over the shoulders and upper part of the bodies of both patients. The effect of this sudden additional warmth was soon apparent. At first convulsive sobs burst from the youth, and he struggled occasionally to rise, but was withheld by the strong arms of the cripple, who retained him in the water by force, but without much effort. The little girl commenced to moan and weep, and seemed in danger of passing into convulsions. The cripple pointed to a black bottle on a deal shelf, and his daughter poured some of its contents into a cup, and held it to the child's lips. She refused to drink the vile spirit, but its strong, pungent odour revived and stimulated her. She now held out her hands to her mother to be taken from the steaming bath, from whence she was borne by the two women into the poor bedroom beyond, to have her wet clothes removed—a task of some difficulty; after which she reappeared at the fireside in her mother's arms, wrapped in a small rough blanket from the girl's bed, and fast asleep.

By this time, Robert Forster was also sufficiently recovered to be safely transported by his father, accompanied by the strange cripple, to the same apartment,

and there being stripped of his wet clothes, and having his boots cut from his swollen feet, he was covered with such bedclothes as these poor folks could muster, —coarse and dirty-looking enough, from which, at another time, the half-conscious sufferer would have shrunk in disgust.

The cripple still silently busied himself, with singular skill and activity, in measures for his patient's full restoration.

He dug up with an iron bar some hot bricks from the blazing hearth, and placed them near to the boy's feet. He hung a blackened tin kettle full of water over the fire, and with the heated contents soon manufactured a dose of hot punch in a tea-cup, which, when swallowed unconsciously, sent the exhausted lad off at once into a dreamy sleep. He then directed the younger boy to undress and get into the rough bed beside his brother, so as to add to the warmth of the latter, and to prevent, by his accustomed presence, the sudden paroxysms of terror which occasionally seized the half-drowned boy, whose mind was still wandering and excited by the danger he had escaped, and by the strong spirit poured down his throat.

The cripple now engaged in earnest consultation with his daughter as to the further disposition of the party for the night. The latter approached Mrs. Forster, and, dropping a curtsy, said, in the country dialect, but in a distinct voice, "Feyther thinks thee and th' little lass had better go wi' me to Miller Grimshaw's, where happen' his missus 'ull try to gie

thee both a bed, and 'ull send a doctor to the lad i' th' mornin'. I'm to tak the cobble down the mill-race to the sluice, where the pool is open, and your good man can draw the paddles whiles feyther tends the lads."

This course seemed to be the best to adopt, as there evidently was no means of sleeping for any other member of the family in that rude habitation, and the gipsy owner, whose features they now recognised as decidedly Egyptian in character, seemed anxious they should go to the place of refuge he had suggested before the miller's house had closed for the night.

They therefore returned to the boat, leaving the two boys with the crippled gipsy, who undertook to take care of them until morning; and before leaving both parents invoked many blessings on his head, besides offering him such substantial reward for his timely service as the state of Mr. Forster's purse at the moment enabled him to do. The strange man would not accept more than a single piece of gold, upon which he spat as it lay shining in the broad palm of his hard hand; but he said as they departed, "Gie t' lass a wee bit siller for luck whin ye part. But for Bessie th' young 'uns ud be 'mongst th' jacks and eels, and, mawbee," he added with a grim smile, "some day thee may do as good a turn for Tammy Roffey."

He then pointed again to his distilling apparatus, and laid one horny finger on his lips, in token of secrecy, as the party left the threshold. As they de-

parted, he seized the handle of his huge bellows and blew the fire, which had been sinking on the hearth, into a vigorous blaze, and then he lifted from the ground a large sheet of bright tin, bent in a curve, and formed into a reflector, having an iron handle at the back. This he fixed on the forge hearth, in a socket prepared for it, so as to cast the strong light of the flame through the doorway on the rough landing-place outside, as the little party cautiously scrambled into the boat; and again a broad beam of light, such as they had first seen, lit up the dismal pool as they pushed off in the narrow open water close to the bank, guiding them forth for a little space into the dark night.

There was evidently a strong current setting in the direction of the dam, and the gipsy girl, who guided the boat from the bow with her boat-hook, skilfully availed herself of it. They soon approached the great masonry wall or dam which crossed the narrow valley above a mill, and confined the waters in the reservoir. The girl now proceeded to unship the two short masts before alluded to, and in a few minutes they glided under a single plank forming a rude foot-bridge over a gap in the dam about three yards wide, where the mill-race ran out of the pool to the mill.

The girl called to them to stoop as they passed beneath this obstruction, and they did so in safety. There was now no necessity for Mr. Forster to use the paddle, which he had plied vigorously up to the present. The stream, confined in a narrow channel, ran swiftly beneath them, and the boat glided rapidly

onward with the current. The noise of the water rushing through the open sluices, and striking the floats of the water-wheel, grew louder as they neared the mill, and soon the building itself loomed in sight, magnified in dimensions by the gloom.

The moon had risen, but dense clouds drove across the sky, and occasionally rendered it difficult for the voyagers to distinguish objects on the adjacent bank. In a little while the boat drifted into the dark shadow of the mill, and was brought up with a shock against the strong iron-barred grating in front of the great water-wheel, whose loud plashing awoke the little child, who commenced to cry.

The gipsy girl now sprang from the boat to the bank, and proceeded to secure the clumsy craft with a chain. She next assisted Mrs. Forster to land, still clasping her terrified child to her breast, and then rapidly preceded the parents up a steep zigzag foot-path to the miller's house. They passed through an open wicket in a hedge into a trim garden, and beheld, directly in front of them, the unpretending mansion which they sought. There were lights in some of the windows, and the moon shone out for a moment on a bright brass knocker of formidable dimensions fixed on a very small green entrance door. To this the girl applied herself, and the door was instantly opened by a tall, handsome man with very dark eyes, which shone by contrast with the whiteness of his face. His hair and whiskers were slightly grey, but at this moment were rendered more so by the addition of a

quantity of the flour he manufactured. His dress also bore witness to his trade, and was all of one light colour. He had just returned from his mill, and had an oil lamp in his hand, the dull light of which he cast on the faces of the strangers outside his door.

"Muster Grimshaw," said the girl, "here's a little child has fallen into th' pool, an's a'most froze. Feyther has another at the forge, and happen' you kin tak' this one in for the night?"

"Bless me, Bessie," said the miller, "is't thee, lass? Come in, friends, come in."

He threw open the door as he spoke, and called to his wife to come downstairs. Mrs. Grimshaw had just ascended to her bedroom with the intention of retiring for the night, but appeared immediately, candlestick in hand, on the landing.

"Here, wife," said the miller, "is a little drown'd child with Betsy Roffey."

Mrs. Grimshaw quickly descended the stairs, and coming close to the poor mother, looked earnestly on the white face of the little girl in her arms. She then flung open a door in the passage leading into the kitchen, where a bright fire was still burning.

Coals were evidently plentiful in the neighbourhood, as a piece about a yard long, called a "raker," stood on end in the grate. The miller struck it with the poker, and a strong flame burst out and roared up the chimney. Mrs. Grimshaw placed the timid woman and her child in an old-fashioned easy-chair before the fire, and proceeded rapidly to investigate their con-

dition, whilst Mr. Forster described the accident to her husband. The latter listened attentively, and then turned to the gipsy girl, who was standing by the doorway, "Bess," he said, "thee had best slip out for Dr. Dixon."

Now, the doctor lived but a little way off, in a cottage which had once been occupied by the miller's father, and the young girl went off in search of him immediately. Meantime, Mrs. Grimshaw had got some milk warming on the fire, and was affectionately busy with the mother and child, both of whom were much in need of assistance.

The little girl still cried bitterly, and clung hysterically to her mother, whose strength was nearly exhausted. Mrs. Grimshaw broke two eggs into the vessel in which the milk was boiling, and then added some sugar, and whipped the whole into a light froth. The little girl swallowed some of this pleasant mixture, and then she ceased crying, and looked wonderingly at the good woman who was so busy in efforts for her recovery. Mrs. Grimshaw had a pleasant comely face, and a happy expression. In a little while the child allowed her to take her in her arms, although she trembled all over with excitement and illness.

"Wife," said the miller, "put her into bed with our Lizzie. It will do her more good than anything else."

Mrs. Grimshaw requested Mrs. Forster to follow her, and proceeded upstairs to her own daughter's room. There, in a pretty bed with snow-white curtains, sat bolt upright, listening to the unusual sounds in the

house, a little girl with long dark hair hanging over her white round shoulders. She had dark eyes like her father below-stairs, but in other respects resembled Mrs. Grimshaw.

“Here is a little sister for you to keep warm, Lizzie,” said her mother; “keep her very close to you.”

Then they placed the little stranger in the bed, and the two children were soon locked in each other’s arms. The miller’s little girl had no sister, and really believed that this was one given to her, and therefore she hugged her very close, and in her arms Jenny Forster fell asleep. When the doctor arrived and saw the children, he wisely left the case in the hands of the good old Dame Nature until morning. “Let them be,” he said, “there’s no medicine like sleep; I shall see her early to-morrow.”

The hospitable miller and his wife provided all the comforts in their power for the unfortunate travellers, and were able to give them a good bed in the house, whilst Bessie Roffey returned by land to her father’s cottage with some “siller” as her modest reward, happy as a queen in contemplating the purchase of a new bonnet.



CHAPTER VI.

THE MILLER.

“I see the wealthy miller yet,
His double chin, his portly size ;
And who that knew him could forget
The busy wrinkles round his eyes ?
The slow wise smile that round about
His dusty forehead, drily curl’d,
Seem’d half within and half without,
And full of dealings with the world !”

TENNYSON.

JACOB GRIMSHAW had been the Dale miller over nineteen years. His father had been the miller before him, and had erected the present flour-mill, which was a good one of its kind. It was held on a long lease from a nobleman who never visited the place, but whose property in that quarter projected awkwardly into the Dale Company’s property, and on the extreme end of the projection, where the Brightmoor valley entered the valley of the Lauter, stood the mill—the “Forge Pool” being the reservoir in which was stored the water required for its use.

Above the mill, and overlooking it on the hillside, stood the miller’s cottage, a pleasant, unpretending

little house, die square, with an even number of windows at each side of the hall-door, which was half hidden by a rustic porch, and was painted an emerald green, and further decorated with a large antique brass knocker, representing a lion's head, out of all proportion to the size of the door it adorned, being in fact a sort of heirloom in the miller's family.

There was another entrance at the opposite side of the house, by which access was had to the public road from the Dale to Brightmoor.

The cottage had been designed and erected by Jacob Grimshaw the younger, when he married; and he took no small pride in its architectural excellence and fitness. It was built of red bricks, and covered with blue slates, and all the external woodwork was painted in bright colours. There were venetian blinds to the windows, which were always kept in a state of brilliancy, and, on the whole, the place was said to be like "a new shilling," and was the standard of excellence in those parts, so far as small houses went.

The miller had a flower-garden in front of his residence, with a white gravelled footpath in the centre, leading from the hall-door to a wicket in the fence, outside which the path descended to the mill by a series of zigzags, down a steep slope, and was carried across the watercourse in front of the mill-wheel by a light wooden bridge, to which the sluices were attached, and from which they were raised and lowered.

This garden was tastefully laid out, and stocked with a great variety of rose trees, and there were curiously

shaped flower-beds and other horticultural devices therein. It was generally believed that its neatness was due to the care bestowed on it by the miller's wife, who was a woman held in much esteem, and deservedly respected by the Dale people, and who had received an education above that of persons in her walk in life.

The miller's garden was the envy and admiration of such of the Dale workmen as were addicted to floriculture, and especially of the skilled modellers, many of whom possessed considerable taste, and whose employment required some knowledge of the forms of plants and foliage.

They would come and stare over the palings on summer evenings and holidays by the hour, and take counsel with one another as to the possibility of importing novel ideas from this little "Eden" to their own rough patches of cultivated ground.

The grounds round the Dale House were extensive and tastefully laid out, but they were chiefly behind the house, and not easily seen by outsiders. It was often said amongst the men that the great landscape artist from London who laid them out "would have had his eye opened" had he previously looked in on Miller Grimshaw and his earthly paradise.

The miller had made himself a "summer house" in his garden, over which was trained a large-leaved creeper, which he spoke of as "his vine and his fig-tree," but which had hitherto produced nothing but caterpillars, in every English species of which it was prolific—green, brown, hairy, or otherwise.

Mrs. Grimshaw had attempted "open-air teas" in the summer time, under the shade of this pleasant arbour, but the occasional admixture of the above-mentioned insects in the tea or the sugar, which resulted, had compelled an abandonment of such *al fresco* meals; consequently the miller had it all to himself in the summer evenings, and smoked very strong tobacco therein, more in the hope that it would disagree with the caterpillars than from any pleasure it gave him personally.

The miller had an only son named Thomas, who was at this time about eighteen years old, and was sharp and clever for his age; but it was reported that he was not as industrious or as good as he ought to have been, considering the pains taken with him by his excellent mother, and the strict rule of his father, both of whom were nevertheless very proud of his abilities. This youth had been articled to a solicitor in Wolverhampton, much against his mother's wish, and had evinced a taste for the profession at a very early age.

There had also been born to the miller a daughter, now about nine years of age, who had been christened Elizabeth, and was as the "apple of his eye."

It was to the care of this little girl he had consigned Jenny Forster on the night of the accident described in the opening chapter of this story.

The miller's business was a steady, thriving one, and he had made money, and saved it, which is often the more difficult problem of the two. He held his land and his mill at a low rent on a long lease, and with this

advantage, added to his pretty cottage and garden, and cows, and wife and children, the people in the Dale expected him to be a happy, contented miller, if not absolutely a "jolly one," like the celebrated individual who lived upon the Dee; but, unfortunately for himself and other people, he was not; he was essentially "a man with a grievance," and instead of sitting in peace under "his vine and fig-tree," like the Israelites of old when they had discomfited their Canaanitish neighbours, he sat there alone "nursing his wrath to keep it warm," and contemplating the cause of his vexation in connection with the large water-wheel which drove his mill.

The mill-wheel was generally at work from six o'clock on Monday morning until twelve o'clock on Saturday night, moving slowly round with a steady sobbing noise, like a patient living thing, accustomed to take its full load of cold water from the long conduit which ran out of the "Forge Pool," and to deliver it quietly beneath, into another conduit which discharged itself into the "Dale Pool" below, this latter being the principal reservoir from which the water-wheels of the company's works were supplied.

Now, there had been a feud between the owners of these water-wheels from time immemorial, as there generally is wherever water-wheels exist close to one another on the same stream, which are not the property of the same individual.

With the exception of horses and wills, there is no more prolific subject for litigation than water-power,

and probably few millers exist who have not had the unpleasant experience of a costly lawsuit in the course of their lives. There are cases in which such suits have been handed down from father to son, like hair shirts to be worn by the unhappy possessors, for the repose of the souls of those who in an evil moment originally commenced them. Such was the inheritance of Jacob Grimshaw.

His father before him had had a "difference" with the owners of the Dale Works, which had caused him to secede altogether from the Society of Friends, of which he had previously been a member, and to wipe off the very dust of his feet outside the doors of their "meeting house," because a serious remonstrance had been publicly addressed to him by one of the elders, therein assembled to consider his very "*un-Friend-like*" and irregular conduct.

Whether the old miller considered that the "spirit" which "moved" the elder on that occasion was a "lying spirit" or was influenced by improper and worldly considerations, I cannot say, but I regret to be obliged to write, that he so far forgot his previous strict training, and the silent usages of the place, as to reply there and then in very strong language, and consequently he was "read out of meeting" with the usual formalities.

Shortly after, he commenced legal proceedings against the Dale Company, "for loss and injury sustained in his business as a miller, and hindrance in the free user and enjoyment of his water-power, by reason of their

improper acts and deeds, and those of evil-disposed persons in their employ."

So ran the endorsement on the "summons and plaint" served on the Brothers Field by a sharp attorney, who despised the usual courtesy of writing previously to the legal gentlemen engaged on the other side, to know if service of the writ would be otherwise accepted, and thus gave Jacob Grimshaw the elder, now happily for every one deceased, the pleasure of stating, as he did on all possible occasions during the remainder of his troubled life, the fact "that he had sarved both on em wi' a writ at their own hall-door, and precious glum they looked, and a pretty penny it ud cost 'em afore they'd see the last on't, that it ud."

It was evident that Jacob Grimshaw, senior, was pretty far gone in the "gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity," when he cast off the peaceable character of a "Friend," and spake thus of respected members of the society; at the same time directing Lawyer Quetchett of Wolverhampton to "lick law at 'em like hailstones," a request which that worthy was not slow to act on at any time, whenever he saw his way to getting his costs either from plaintiff or defendant, or from both if he could, and thus commenced the great case of "Grimshaw against Joshua and Jediah Field," damages being laid at five thousand pounds.

The brothers, thus attacked, would, if they could, have adhered to the peaceable tenets of their persuasion, and turned the other cheek to the smiter,

but that would by no means suit Mr. Quetchett's book, and would not have been half enough of humiliation to impose on them in the opinion of the elder Grimshaw, who wished to see something for his money besides "soft sawder," as he termed a pacific letter addressed to him by Joshua Field at the commencement of the litigation. Despite of Quaker principles and practice, but with much mental anxiety and inward throes of conscience, the Messieurs Field finding the miller more obdurate than his own nether millstone, and deaf to solemn adjurations intoned at him by several broad-brimmed elders, in the sonorous and quaint accent habitual to the "Friends," were driven at length to appeal to the carnal weapon, and to meet the "man of sin," in the person of Lawyer Quetchett, by an injunction to restrain his further proceedings, obtained on an ex-parte statement, duly "affirmed" by them, and put in by their legal advisers, Messrs. Johnson, Lawson, and Cobb, of Bedford Row, London, who had a considerable practice amongst "Friends" in defending actions and conveying property, but as a rule nothing whatever to do for them as plaintiffs.

When old Jacob Grimshaw heard that the case was thrown into Chancery, and that he was thereby deprived of his expected triumph in hailing the brothers before judge and jury at Stafford Assizes, where the record was laid, he shut down the sluices of his mill, and paid off his men and betook himself to Wolverhampton for a series of consultations with his attorney,

who laboured in vain to explain to him the difference between proceedings in Chancery and those at common law ; and ultimately carried off his obtuse and irate client to London, where they obtained the assistance of the London agents of Mr. Quetchett, Messrs. Skinner and Clinch, of Lincoln's Inn, who immediately retained the learned Mr. Waterright, of the Chancery Bar, a leading counsel in those days, known to be very skilful in all matters connected with mills and disputed water-power, before whom they proceeded to lay a case, and on whose advice in due time certain affidavits were sworn by Jacob Grimshaw, senior, and filed by his solicitors.

The old miller felt happy in the idea that he could now take any number of oaths, instead of "affirming," as in days of yore, and as his opponents, still under the yoke, were obliged to do. He was fully convinced in his own mind that the weight and effect of the documents put in by his lawyers would be thus materially increased, and would preponderate over those prepared by the other side in the milder form adopted by "Friends." Those were the pleasant days when a Chancery suit proceeded slowly, and was fortunate if it reached a hearing once in two or three years, when the documents entered by both sides had accumulated beyond all reasonable limits, and required cutting down by some new motion before the Chancellor. At first old Grimshaw hung a good deal about the courts, and tried in vain to comprehend the legal jargon then profusely employed in matters of equity.

At other times he drifted helplessly to and fro between his lodgings in Holborn and the offices of Messrs. Skinner and Clinch; but after three or four months' waiting, and an expenditure of about as many hundred pounds, he began to sicken and get tired of it, and waxed wroth and impatient; and was consequently advised to return home with the view to his cooling down a little, and collecting facts for further affidavits during the long vacation.

Mr. Quetchett had returned long since to his business in Wolverhampton, but came up occasionally to see how things were moving, or, as he termed it, "to keep the pie hot." On such occasions, observing the melancholy aspect of his unfortunate client, he endeavoured to revive his flagging spirits by taking him to see the performances at Astley's, which was then a favourite place of amusement with country-folk visiting London. Old Jacob invariably sat like a stone, gazing vacantly at the "mountebanks," as he termed them, and yet seeing nothing; being totally absorbed in the suit he had set going, he took no interest in any of the performers, of whom he said mournfully, "Man delighted him not, nor woman either."

At length, Mr. Quetchett, finding him bad company, left him to his own devices, which were wretched enough, and finally urged him, as Messrs. Skinner and Co. had done before, to return to his native air, as knotty points had developed themselves in the case which it would require the assistance of scientific wit-

nesses to investigate, in order that Mr. Waterright might be able to move the court effectually after the recess; and thus old Jacob Grimshaw went back to Lauterdale a sadder, if not a wiser, and certainly a poorer man than when he set out.



CHAPTER VII.

THE GIPSY.

“ Loud sang the Spanish cavalier,
And thus his ditty ran :
‘ God send the gipsy lassie here,
And not the gipsy man.’ ”

LONGFELLOW.

AS the case proceeded next term, and developed itself into larger proportions under the nursing hands of Mr. Quetchett and his London agents, other persons were dragged in, and made parties to the suit despite of themselves. Messrs. Johnson, Lawson, and Cobb were compelled, in the interest of their clients, and with the view to bringing extraneous pressure to bear on the enemy, to include in the proceedings the nobleman from whom the mill was leased, who was thus for the first time made personally aware of his ownership in this property, and of the existence of his litigious tenant, and who devoutly wished both at the bottom of the Red Sea, in consequence of the trouble thereby given to him and his solicitors, and also to the solicitors of mortgagees and trustees connected with his estates, all of whom were obliged to file affidavits, and

to appear by counsel. In retaliation, Mr. Quetchett contrived to ferret out and attack an unfortunate tenant of the Dale Company, who held a wretched cottage under them at a nominal rent on the margin of the Forge Pool, and who, being a nervous man, with a wholesome dread of law, got so frightened in consequence, that he packed up his few goods and chattels, and fled away one dark night, leaving the key in the door, which he deemed to be a legal surrender of the premises.

The cottage remained unoccupied for some time after this, and fell into bad repute and worse repair, until it was discovered to be occupied without permission by a strange-looking crippled gipsy, accompanied by his dark-skinned wife, who looked like a witch, and, it was said, told fortunes. The man himself appeared harmless enough. Why he had totally abandoned his wandering life and the society of his nomadic tribe was never fully known; but it was rumoured that he had met with a dreadful accident at a railway crossing whilst driving an obstinate donkey, and subsequently had had both his legs amputated in the county hospital, in order to save his life.

On being discharged from thence, and charitably furnished by the surgeons with the leather-covered basket in which the stumps of his lower limbs were concealed, and in which he managed to shuffle about, he had, slowly and painfully, dragged himself across the country to Brightmoor, followed by his spouse, who had been permitted to nurse him in the hospital, and,

by some mysterious instinct, they ultimately sought shelter in the deserted cottage, in which the gipsy had dwelt ever since.

At first, the Brothers Field, on being informed of the new occupants, were inclined to turn them out as suspected tramps and vagabonds, and Josiah Morris was deputed to visit the place, and give them formal notice to quit, accompanied with wholesome counsel; but when once he had seen the poor maimed being and his apparently affectionate helpmate, and reported their wretched condition to his employers, the man's title became as good as a lease for life. He not only received permission to remain free of rent, but the hovel was repaired, and furnished for his use.

On learning that he had worked as a blacksmith amongst the people of his tribe, and could forge horse-shoes and shoe horses, Mr. Joshua Field caused a small forge to be erected for him in the kitchen of the old cottage, and supplied him with the necessary tools, and a stock of iron. He was also permitted to excavate fuel free of charge from the outcrop of the coal-field owned by the Company, a portion of which actually formed the rear wall of his dwelling. Sufficient employment was provided for him in replacing the shoes cast by the Company's horses as they struggled slowly up the tramway at the opposite side of the pool with the heavy corves of limestone required for the smelting furnaces higher up the valley, or returned from thence with loads of pig-iron and coals for the works in the Dale below.

The gipsy blacksmith, to whom we have been already introduced in the person of Tammy Roffey, proved himself fertile of resources. The difficulty which at first existed in the fact that he had to forge his iron shoes at one side of the pool, and fix them on the horses' feet when required at the other side, was speedily got over by the construction of a rude boat and a wire ferry, both of which he made with his own hands, and by this means he passed rapidly to and fro from his workshop when summoned by the drivers of the waggon trains, with whom he gossiped learnedly about horses and dogs as he did his work.

The wire strained across the pond served as a sort of telegraphic communication between him and the men during the hours of darkness, as, by beating on the upright post at their side of the pool, they could readily summon "Gipsy Tam," as he was called, from his den over the water, whenever his services were needed to repair the frequent pedal losses of the four-footed beasts, which worked by day and night on the tramway, or to supply lost linch-pins and links to the waggons.

Occasionally some wicked youngsters, who had discovered this system of communication, would bring the poor cripple from his anvil, with his tools and a stock of ready-made iron shoes in his boat, by rapping on the post at night, when he could not see clearly across the pond ; but, after a few disappointed trips at the call of these mischievous urchins, Tammy was too many for them, and invented a mode of discovering

whether the summons was a legitimate one or otherwise. He constructed a powerful and simple reflector, by bending a large sheet of bright tin on a light iron frame, and by means of a handle at the back and his forge fire, he could project a broad beam of light over a wide arc through the open doorway of his hut, and then, peering across the pool in its path, readily ascertained whether the summons proceeded from friends or enemies.

It was with this instrument he had so suddenly cast a bright light on the dark water beneath the old bridge on the night on which this story opened, in answer to the loud cries of Mr. Forster; and it was by means of the wire ferry he had contrived that he arrived so rapidly and opportunely on the scene of disaster with the dark-eyed girl, who was at that time the sole companion residing in his solitary dwelling-place.

Shortly after the advent of the pair of gipsies at the "Forge Pool," which was so called after the workshop erected in the old cottage on its banks, there was born unto them a son, who, as he grew up, gave evidence that he possessed all the natural characteristics of the people to whom his parents belonged,—untameable and incapable of appreciating any effort made to civilise or reclaim him. He was a clever urchin, devoted to his gipsy mother, who invariably spoke to him in the Rommany language, and instilled into him a love of freedom and contempt for the "Giorgios," as she termed the Christian people by whom they were sur-

rounded, and to whom at present they owed the means of subsistence.

He was an adept at capturing fish in the deep pond at the forge door, and in snaring the wild fowl that occasionally came to feed therein, and it was suspected also that he sometimes appropriated the miller's tame ducks when they ventured within reach of his ingenious engines, as unaccountable deficiencies in the stock were experienced during his residence in the neighbourhood.

He readily learned from his mother to weave baskets from the willows which grew near the reservoir, but he stoutly resisted all teaching from a Dale schoolmaster, to whose care he had been reluctantly entrusted for a short period, at the earnest request of Miss Rebecca Field, who in those days took much interest in the gipsies.

During his short enforced attendance at the juvenile seminary in question, he had set most of the other children by the ears, and utterly depraved some of them in their ideas of *meum* and *tuum* before he had spent a week in their society. It was therefore no wonder that Tawno Roffey was speedily allowed to return to the care of his gipsy mother, who was looked on with much greater suspicion by the Dale people than was accorded to her crippled and industrious husband, for whom their sympathies were naturally excited by his affliction, but of whom they really knew very little, except what was related by the waggon-drivers using the tramway, as he rarely ventured into the Dale, and could not travel very far from his forge.

The gipsy woman sometimes disappeared with her boy for a week or two whenever there were fairs or merrymakings in the neighbourhood, and it was known that she was thus absent on fortune-telling expeditions, or other irregular methods of earning money in the society of her people who attended such meetings.

It was also believed that she ultimately became discontented with the settled manner of life enforced by her husband's condition ; but, to the surprise of every one who had taken the trouble to observe her movements, she returned on one occasion from a longer absence than usual with an infant female child, which she invariably spoke of afterwards as her daughter, but which it was suspected had been recently stolen by the woman during her wanderings.

When this child was about five or six years old, Mrs. Roffey started, with her precocious son, on one of her periodic excursions, leaving the little girl behind her with her husband, and she had not been seen or heard of in the neighbourhood ever since.

Tammy Roffey never spoke of her or of the lad again ; he thenceforth devoted all his attention to the little girl, who was much more tractable than the boy had been, and warmly reciprocated his rough affection.

The miller's good wife took much interest in the little deserted creature, and provided her with clothes ; she had also induced her assumed parent to allow the child to attend the female infant school in the Dale, and there she had acquired some slight education ; but

the gipsy man soon became jealous of the long absences thus occasioned, and had unfortunately withdrawn her at an early age from the means of instruction afforded her, in order that she might assist him in his work as far as she could. It was to this girl that Jenny Forster owed her life when she was rescued from drowning in the pool.

Notwithstanding many rebuffs from the gipsy, Mrs. Grimshaw, who was a warm-hearted, well-educated woman, continued her exertions for the improvement of the poor neglected girl, who, in return, conceived a passionate regard for her and her little daughter.

She was always very thankful for the efforts made to teach her, and punctual at her lessons in the miller's house, when permitted to attend there by the gipsy, who, like all solitary beings, was often uncertain and suspicious in his moods, and feared the child would be weaned from her attachment to him. However, by patience and judicious management on the part of Mrs. Grimshaw, the girl was taught to read and write with tolerable facility, and also to mend her own and her father's clothes—which latter accomplishment he approved of much more than the former.

Mrs. Grimshaw laboured hard to instil some religious teaching into the mind of her protégée, and frequently read to her such portions of the Bible as were suited to her comprehension. Sometimes the girl would ask questions which showed that this teaching was sinking deeply into her heart, but as yet Mrs. Grimshaw did not deem it safe to propose that she should be baptised,

as it was not known whether the gipsy would permit the rite to be celebrated or not, as he himself resisted all efforts to interest him in the truths of Christianity, and was reputed an utter heathen by the God-fearing people of the Dale, some of whom had in vain attempted his conversion.

Some years after the departure of his wife and son, the gipsy added to his business as a blacksmith a more lucrative and dangerous employment in the illicit manufacture of spirits.

He was tempted to this at first by some of the waggon-drivers, who occasionally took refuge in his forge from the inclemency of the weather. The life led by these men was hard in the extreme. They were exposed to all the severity of wind and rain, by day and night, as they journeyed between the limestone quarries in the hills beyond the river and the furnaces above Brightmoor, often sinking over the ankles in the mud of the tramway; consequently the possession of stimulants became a much-coveted thing, perhaps all the more so because of the difficulties in the way of obtaining them.

At first the gipsy's hut was made a depository for liquor obtained from a distance, and retailed by Tammy at a small profit; but ultimately, being an ingenious man, accustomed to working in solder and tin, he ventured on the construction of the apparatus which was seen at work when Mr. Forster visited his forge.

The gipsy had seen the pattern of the still and the process of manufacture during his wanderings in early life, and had somewhat improved on the original. The

solitary position of his forge, and the difficulty of access thereto, except by means of his boat and ferry, together with an abundant supply of fuel and water close at hand, favoured the success of his operations, which he contrived to conceal by various cunning devices, such as setting up a vigorous hammering on his anvil whenever his quick ear detected the approach of strangers by night, at which time only could the manufacture be carried on with safety.

He had set up this loud hammering on hearing Mr. Forster's voice and footsteps, and had cast the strong light across the water from his reflector to discover who were the strangers approaching, and so precipitated the accident he subsequently did his best to repair.

Returning to the history of Jacob Grimshaw the elder and his great lawsuit. Time would fail to tell how it dragged on for several weary years, and what thorns in the sides of the Dale Company Job Quetchett and his colleagues proved themselves to be, despite the stout resistance of Messrs. Lawson and Cobb, aided by the leading lights of the equity bar, whom they employed to oppose Mr. Waterright. Is it not all written somewhere in the records of the Court of Chancery; and engraven also on the fleshy tables of the heart of Jacob Grimshaw the younger, the present miller, who inherited the suit from his unfortunate parent, after the latter had broken his heart at it, and died a victim to the fierce contest he had promoted, bequeathing to his son, with his last words, his undying hatred of the peaceful Quakers whom he had driven to oppose him?

The young man might otherwise have grown up a happy miller and ended his days in peace, but his mind was warped and embittered at an early period by an intimate acquaintance with the proceedings, and thereby imbued with the wish to revenge his father's failure; for, after all, the old vindictive miller failed to gain his ends, and had at length been obliged to abandon the cause from sheer exhaustion, when Mr. Quetchett had drained him of every shilling he could raise without availing himself of the means of his son, who had fortunately taken to the mill at an early period in the suit, as will be related hereafter, and whose resources were wisely placed by his father-in-law beyond the old man's control.

Jacob Grimshaw the elder died as hundreds of men die who embark in the quicksands of litigation—a broken, miserable, disappointed man, full of “envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness;” and on his death-bed he charged his son, sooner or later, to endeavour, by reviving the suit, to obtain the justice which he fully believed he was entitled to.

It was fortunate for the younger Grimshaw that up to the present he had been compelled by circumstances to leave the matter in abeyance, but it was well known that he had recently fulfilled a part of his father's last injunction by devoting his own son to the pursuit of the profession from which all the old man's trouble and misfortunes had arisen.

“Hist, Jacob,” said the old dying miller, raising his grey head from the pillow for the last time, as he

struggled for breath. "Bring the boy up to be a lawyer, and let him tackle 'em again—darn 'em," and with that he shook his clenched fist in the air, in the direction of the Dale House, and fell back dead with a curse on his white lips.

It was in fulfilment of this last request that young Tom Grimshaw was articled so early in life to lawyer Quetchett, a hook-nosed, thin, shrivelled man, in considerable practice at Wolverhampton, where he had scraped together a large fortune from the wrecks which strewed his path.

He had recently taken his eldest son into partnership, but still looked closely after the business, which had much increased since the period of the Chancery suit about the Dale Mills; and when he received a letter from his former client's son, inquiring "his terms for apprenticing his boy Thomas to the law"—the modern verb "*to article*" had not been invented at that period—the old man's eyes twinkled with a merry light, and his hooked beak bent into a sharper curve, and gave to his parchment visage the aspect of a vulture.

"Let him come by all means," he said, and wrote immediately in reply, stating his fee, and expressing much satisfaction at the trust about to be reposed in him; and then he looked long and lovingly through his horn spectacles at a large japanned tin box on a shelf over his head, lettered "Grimshaw v. Joshua and Jediah Field," and took snuff copiously, which his clerks said he always did "when he scented the prey afar off."

When old Grimshaw died, young Jacob had then been three years married, and had worked the mill on his own account during that period, paying his father a rental more than sufficient for his personal wants. How Jacob the younger came to stand in his father's shoes, and how he won his good wife, whose acquaintance we have just made, must be told in the chapters following, although in so doing it is needful to go back more than twenty years in order that the reader may become acquainted with the people of Lauterdale, amongst whom the Forsters came to live.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE METHODYS.

“Sects in religion?—Yes, of every race,
We nurse some portion in our favour'd place;
Not one warm preacher of each growing sect
Can say our borough treats him with neglect.”

CRABBE.

WHEN old Jacob Grimshaw shut down his mill sluices, and set out on his war-path to Wolverhampton to entrust himself to the evil guidance of Mr. Quetchett, young Jacob was for a time cast adrift and without occupation.

He tried fishing for “jack” in the Forge Pool, until he lost all his best tackle in the jaws of the ancient monsters who inhabited its depths.

He then wandered down the Dale to the Severn, in pursuit of eels, but soon wearied of the capture of those unwholesome slippery things, whose tenacity of life disgusted him; and finally he found some amusement in inspecting the operations of some workmen then engaged in the construction of an iron bridge across the Severn, which was to supersede the old horse-ferry and wire rope, still to be seen in operation lower down the river.

This did very well for weekdays ; but his Sundays were dreadfully dull ; and as his father had joined no religious denomination since his secession from the Quakers, young Jacob had never been inside any other place of worship than the "Friends' Meeting House" in his life, and to enter there would be unpleasant under present circumstances.

He had neither mother, sister, or brother alive, and he moped alone, in the old house at home, all the morning until his melancholy drove him forth again amongst his kind ; who, so far as the company's workmen were concerned, bore him no goodwill, and sided to a man with their employers, whom they believed to have been unjustifiably attacked by his litigious parent.

Mooning along through the Dale one Sunday evening during his father's absence in London, he stopped outside one of the large Dissenting chapels recently erected by the Wesleyan Methodists, to listen to the peculiar singing of the congregation, whose quaint and impressive tunes are still preserved in the Black Country chapels without change, and who are generally spoken of there as "The Methodys." Jacob felt a longing to go in, but was shy and irresolute ; and so kept about the principal door, which was in the end of the building directly facing the pulpit, in which one of the ministers, with a large hymn-book in his hand, was alternately singing with the congregation, and sonorously giving out two lines of each verse at a time, swaying his body to and fro as he read and sang.

The sudden alternations from loud soul-stirring

strains to still silence whilst the "preacher" read his two lines with fervent emphasis, struck Jacob as worth attention, compared with the stiff and monotonous worship to which he had been hitherto accustomed; as on many occasions the "Friends" met, and sat in silence through the appointed time at their place of worship, and separated without the "moving of the spirit," for which the elders waited before they spoke.

Jacob crept cautiously within the rude brick porch, and then up to the inner door itself, which was open, a red cloth curtain being suspended across it. There he remained peeping in round the sides of the drapery, at the body of earnest worshippers within. His motions were not long unobserved by the good shepherd in the pulpit, ever on the watch for stray sheep behind that curtain.

He indicated with a thumb and forefinger, held in a manner well understood by a watchful sentinel beneath, that a brand was to be snatched from the burning. The devoted servant so telegraphed to proceeded cautiously, and with the advantage of previous experience, to put his pastor's behests into execution. Slipping quietly out by a side door, he crept up carefully behind Jacob, with whose personal appearance and name he was well acquainted, and suddenly taking him in the rear, placed a hand gently on his shoulder, and said in a low voice, "Friend Jacob, come in and worship with us." Thus accosted, Jacob had no time to think of excuse or retreat, and ere he was well aware, found himself being led by the arm up the central passage, and located

between his captor and a young girl who immediately placed at his service the half of the little thick hymn-book from which she was reading.

Jacob glanced timidly upward, with the intention of mildly looking his thanks, and encountered a pair of dove-like eyes, which sent a thrill through him such as he had never before experienced. He recognised at a glance that the young girl beside him, whose fingers were close to his on the cover of that little fat red book, the lines of which swam vaguely before his eyes, had the prettiest face he had ever looked on, and when her lips opened immediately afterwards to continue the hymn which his abrupt entrance had momentarily suspended, his ears told him that her voice was the sweetest to which they had ever listened. Jacob did his best to attend to the long fervent extempore prayer which succeeded the hymn, filled as it was with strong imagery, of which the more zealous members of the congregation signified their approval by loud responsive ejaculations accompanied with severe bodily contortions, which occasionally startled him by their violence. He also tried to grasp the thread of the very long sermon which followed, and in which he thought the minister was intentionally "preaching at him," when he spoke of "a lost sheep in the wilderness whose parent was drinking of the waters of Marah in all their bitterness afar off in the city of Babylon,"—evidently forgetting his Bible topography in regard to the non-contiguity of the two places in his desire to illustrate forcibly and indeed with some truth, his

opinion of the actual state of Jacob's father, at that period in London engaged in prosecuting his lawsuit.

Still in the present sweet company Jacob would have willingly sat out ten sermons of the same length, and endured besides the keen glances of the Methodists, male and female, covertly shot at him from all sides, to emphasize and give point to the broad hints of the excited preacher over his head; who, as he warmed with his subject, smote the worn cloth cushion of the pulpit with dangerous vehemence, scattering a cloud of dust, and anon wiped the perspiration from his heated brow with a large red cotton pocket-handkerchief. Jacob consoled his chafing spirit by occasional glances out of the corners of his eyes at the young damsel beside him, whose attention was at present totally absorbed in the homily poured forth, like water on a dry and thirsty land, from the lips of the Reverend Abel Slowman, "superintendent" of the Dale Circuit; the word "superintendent" meaning chiefly in his case that, as a married clergyman and a middle-aged one, he had the supervision of a younger and unmarried minister, who preached on alternate Sundays in the chapel.

When the sermon was ended—and it lasted a good hour and a quarter, the quarter extra being given in specially on Jacob's account—his attentive guardian, who had captured him in the porch, did not lose sight of him, but hospitably invited him to meet the preacher and his colleague, and spend the remainder of the evening with them at his cottage at the foot of the Dale.

Jacob had been wondering in himself whether it would be an improper thing to do, or likely to lead to unpleasant consequences, if he were to venture to follow the damsel afar off, even unto her entering in at the gate of her house, in order that he might thenceforth haunt the place until he should haply see her issuing forth again. Now, here was a chance thrown in his way, not to be refused even by so shy a young fellow as Jacob was, although at present under a cloud, and still suffering from the effects of the recent exhortation; and so he hastily stammered out his thanks, and ere he had recovered his equanimity found himself walking beside the daughter of the man who had invited him, whom he recognised as John Maltby, a thriving corn dealer and malster in the Dale, having many barges of his own trading on the river to and from Bristol. Mr. Maltby remained behind to escort the minister, and entrusted Jacob to his only daughter, Patty, then about seventeen years of age, with whom he had recently shared the hymn-book.

There had been money dealings for corn and freight between Mr. Maltby and Jacob's father, of which the latter had invariably spoken with satisfaction, and thus the young man already knew something of his host.

After an interval of two or three minutes' silence, in which Jacob and Patty Maltby had made some progress side by side from the chapel, the latter at length cautiously broke the ice by an inquiry as to Jacob's appreciation of the address they had both

been so highly privileged in hearing from Mr. Slowman.

"I can't say," said Jacob, "that I listened with much pleasure to the whole sermon; for it appeared to me that the man spake somewhat unkindly of one who is absent, though he named him not, and also that he was over-excited about a matter of which he knows little or nothing."

"Truly," said Patty, "it must have appeared so to you, but I do not doubt he had your welfare at heart; he is a good man, and not intentionally unkind to any one."

Here it must be observed that Patty Maltby had thought in her own mind that the exhortation was a little too severe. Considering that the young man had been invited into the chapel, it was rather hard for him to hear his own father held up as an especially black sheep to the congregation, and it had also occurred to Patty that this was not exactly the best way to induce him to come again. On this account she was more friendly with Jacob than she might otherwise have been on so short an acquaintance, in the hope of removing from his mind his evident feeling of annoyance at the very personal remarks of Mr. Slowman.

Jacob was pleased with her gentleness of manner and the kind tone of her voice, and he wondered how it was he had never before set eyes on this maiden in Lauderdale—the fact being that she had been absent for a considerable time at a favourite Wesleyan school in the north of England, where an education superior

to anything to be obtained at home had been imparted to her, together with the careful religious teaching for which these zealous people have been justly celebrated.

“I liked the singing very much,” said Jacob, desiring to change the subject; “and,” he continued, plucking up courage at last to pay a compliment to his companion, although he stammered and blushed to the roots of his hair in doing so, “thy voice pleased mine ear most of all.”

“Our people praise God with a willing heart,” said Patty, dexterously avoiding the personal application of the compliment. “We have a class for the practice of sacred music once a week, conducted by our younger minister, Mr. Clayton”—here a faint tinge of colour suffused the full cheeks and clear skin of Patty; as she remembered that people joked about Mr. Clayton as an admirer of hers, and she thought she had needlessly mentioned his name to a stranger. “Probably,” she added, “you may see him this evening at my father’s house; he has a good voice and an ear for harmony.”

“Do you like music, Mr. Grimshaw?” she inquired, peering up cautiously from under her straw bonnet at the tall dark-eyed youth who strode beside her, and inwardly drawing comparisons in her own mind between him and the young minister alluded to, who was small of stature, and otherwise a poor specimen of physical development.

“I fear I have never heard anything worth listen-

ing to until this evening," said Jacob, returning to the complimentary tone, but not in so point-blank a manner as before.

"You will probably hear more at my father's house this evening," said Patty, "and you may join with us in singing if you wish to do so; our tunes are readily caught by ear; but if you wish to learn a little from notes, I am sure Mr. Clayton would gladly admit you to his classes. We meet on Wednesday evening at the chapel class-rooms, which are not far from your father's house."

"I think it likely you have a good voice," she added, venturing to repay Jacob's complimentary speech in kind, but judging solely from what little she had heard him speak, as he had not joined in the singing at the chapel that evening.

"I have never sung a note," said Jacob. "The Friends do not cultivate psalmody, and I have never before entered any other place of worship than theirs."

"But now I hope we shall see you often," said Patty. "I have heard that your father has left the Society of Friends. No doubt they worship God in spirit and in truth; but to me it has always appeared a cold and chilling worship. Did it not appear so to you?"

Jacob paused for a while to think the question over, and then said seriously, "I have not thought of the subject sufficiently to answer thee just now, but I will attend thy chapel for a season,"—he wished to add,

solely because his fair listener asked him to do so ; but he feared the actual reason for his ready compliance would not please her if stated openly, and he particularly desired to please her if he could.

Patty looked up with a smile, which Jacob dreamt of for the next week, and said quickly, as she placed her hand on the latch of a neat little wicket leading into a garden, "Remember, I shall expect to see you next Sabbath in our seat. This is my father's house, and thou art welcome;" she had involuntarily fallen into the manner of speech of her companion, in her pleasure at the idea of seeing the stray sheep regularly attending chapel.

She tripped lightly up the footpath which wound in and out amidst shrubs and rose-trees to the cottage door, and opened it by simply raising a latch. There were no burglars or thieves in the Dale in those days, and people never dreamt of locking up their houses during temporary absence on Sunday evenings.

The two servant-girls who lived in the house were Wesleyans also, and regularly attended the chapel morning and evening, with their master and his family, and had followed closely on Patty's footsteps homeward, and now both appeared at the garden-gate. These girls had enlivened the way home at first with serious converse on the stirring sermon they had heard from Mr. Slowman, and its special application to Jacob's father, and wondered how young Miss Patty would "take up" so suddenly with the son of such a reprobate as they had heard spoken of as then on bad

intents at Babylon, which was in their opinion, without doubt, literally true, as they knew the place was mentioned in the Old Testament, and must exist somewhere, for evil-disposed people like the old miller to frequent.

As their distance increased from the chapel, the effect of Mr. Slowman's exordium grew fainter, until they finally fell on a discussion as to the ages and heights of the young couple walking before them, ending in an argument as to the relative personal merits of Jacob and the Rev. Silas Clayton; upon which they ultimately found a verdict favourable to Jacob, who was at least a head taller than the young minister, not to speak of other advantages in good looks and breadth of shoulders. The conversation then lapsed into the worldly strain of Jacob's chance of inheriting the mill, as the only son and heir of the man at Babylon, and of young Miss Patty having "a pretty penny" as the sole daughter of the well-to-do maltster; and finally the two girls concluded in their own minds that no doubt it would shortly be a match, and a very good one; and even got so far as to calculate on the number of months which would be requisite before the correct "company keeping" would be over; a subject on which they differed in opinion,—the elder girl, who had been already disappointed twice by fickle swains, considering six weeks quite long enough "if people only knew their own minds;" the younger, who had only recently got a sweetheart, pleading for at least as many months. From this the discussion

shifted to the theological difficulty of celebrating marriage between a Quaker and a Wesleyan, involving doubts as to the validity of Quakers' marriages in general, and the hope that Miss Patty would bring him over to the chapel altogether, in which her chances of success as against the efforts of Mr. Slowman and his colleague were "all to nothing," in their opinion.

The subject of the dresses they would wear at the wedding was next exhaustively handled, and would no doubt have given the girls full occupation for the next hour, had not their walk and conversation come to an end at the same moment at the garden-gate, where they beheld the cause of all their castle-building standing, six feet in his shoes, before them on the path, backed by the pretty figure of their young mistress, who was waiting discreetly for their advent before she entered the cottage with a stranger.



CHAPTER IX.

THE PREACHER.

“ See yonder preacher to his people pass !
Borne up and swell'd by tabernacle gas ;
Much he discourses and of various points,
All unconnected—void of limbs and joints ;
He rails, persuades, explains, and moves the will
By fierce bold words, and strong mechanic skill.”

CRABBE.

IT is wonderful how the thoughts of young women, coming from chapel on summer evenings, run upon marrying and giving in marriage.

It may be that their hearts turn to all good things as a matter of course, after the profitable exhortations delivered to them by their spiritual pastors and masters. Marriages are said to be made in heaven, and notwithstanding the ill success of some of the matrimonial unions in this lower world, and the existence of a Divorce Court in active operation, with a constant arrear of business, it is to be hoped the exceptions only prove the rule.

The two girls who worked out the great problem of the lives of Jacob Grimshaw and Patty Maltby on that summer Sunday evening's walk, were, after all, only

acting on conclusions derived from past experience, stimulated by secret sympathy on their own parts, and were but representatives of fifty other womenfolk, who took in at a glance the beginning and end of the earnest conversation between the two young people, who were themselves utterly unconscious of the kindly interest they excited in the bosoms of the female Methodists.

Truly the star of the Rev. Silas Clayton was not in the ascendant that evening, and his tuning fork, with which he carefully pitched his voice ere he led off his favourite "six lines eights," ought to have been a divining instrument, and warned him there was an enemy in the camp. I fear the lively interest taken by Patty Maltby in the salvation of this all but lost sheep, left alone amongst ravenous wolves, whilst his erring parent was absent in that dreadful Babylon, and the extra number of inches in height which Providence has bestowed upon Jacob, added to his dark curling hair and brown eyes, as contrasted with the straight yellow locks and grey cat-like orbs of the youthful pastor, will prove too many for poor Silas, who had hitherto made the most of his opportunities, in season and out of season, especially at those Wednesday evening music lessons, whereat, under his tuition, Patty played the new harmonium which had been covertly smuggled into the largest class-room of the chapel, and which the zealous minister hoped some day to introduce into the end gallery itself, with the view to improving the singing of the congregation.

Unfortunately there were serious objections to the

instrument on the part of his superintendent Mr. Slowman, who thought it a dangerous innovation, and decided opposition from some of the "class leaders," who announced their intention, on hearing the first note from its keyboard, "there and then to lift their cushions and quit."

As the two girls passed Patty standing by the doorstep, she quietly gave them some instructions as to the evening meal, called a "good tea" amongst the Dale folk, with which the souls and bodies of the ministers and of her father and his guest were to be refreshed immediately, and then she proceeded to show Jacob the beauties of the garden. The front of the cottage was covered with climbing roses, and there were many beautiful standard specimens amongst the walks. Jacob admired and praised everything, but saw only the little graceful figure flitting to and fro amongst the flowers, and heard only the sweet tones of her voice. What she said he could not well remember, and did not clearly understand; but he felt like a man in a pleasant dream, and answered mechanically. Patty feared the sermon had been too much for him, and attributed his absent manner to the emotion or anxiety she thought it had naturally excited in him on his father's account.

At this moment they heard the footsteps and voices of the "preacher" and her father approaching the house, and in the next instant they appeared at the garden-gate, to which Patty ran to meet them. Mr. Maltby playfully chucked his daughter under the chin,

and made some pleasant allusion to the speed with which she had carried off Jacob ; the minister took her little white hand between his broad palms in an assumed impressive manner, and said with mock solemnity, “ What have you done with the stray lamb, Patty ? have you prepared him for our supper with mint sauce ? ”

Patty was used to the pleasantries of Mr. Slowman, who was never so cheerful as immediately after he had preached his most melancholy warning sermons. Jacob overheard the lively observations of the two men, and the light manner of the minister, of whom he was previously somewhat in awe, jarred on his excited frame of mind, and impressed him unfavourably. They caught sight of him as they came up the winding footpath, and both approached and shook hands in a friendly manner. Mr. Maltby bade him heartily welcome to his cottage, the minister likewise to his chapel, and hoped he should see him there often ; whilst Patty ran into the house to get rid of her bonnet, and to hasten the movements of her gossiping hand-maidens within, leaving the young man to the care of the two men outside. Jacob had an instinctive dread of a renewal of the subject lately discoursed from the chapel pulpit, but soon discovered that the Rev. Abel Slowman, in the garden of his friend, was a very different man from the excited preacher of half an hour since. Now he beamed all over with smiles, and inquired kindly after Jacob’s father, whom he had a little while ago represented as so black a sheep, condemned to drink those unpleasant waters of Marah. He never

once alluded to the lawsuit, and was altogether so pleasant that Jacob began to doubt his ears, and to wonder whether he had not been in error in hastily adopting a personal application of the strongest passages in that dreadful sermon. John Maltby knew better, and expected fully that Mr. Slowman would be in the other line of business again before they separated, and that poor Jacob would hear more of the delinquencies of his parent from the mild-looking man now delicately regaling his nostrils with a moss-rose.

In a little while Patty appeared again, divested of her bonnet, and clad in a pretty white dress. She tripped lightly up to her father, and bade them all come in to tea.

Mr. Maltby asked if the junior minister had arrived.

Silas Clayton was expected to join the party after his ministrations at the other chapel higher up the Dale, and Patty answered shyly that no doubt he would be there directly, as it was later than usual.

John Maltby wound his strong arm round his daughter's slender waist, and lifted her playfully over the door-step, and then he turned to Jacob, and bade him come in.

They entered the parlour of the cottage, which looked out on the garden at the other side, and had deep casement windows, which were open. Jacob recognised at once an air of comfort and even luxury in the apartment, in contrast with the bare walls and

uncarpeted floors of his father's house. Not the cottage subsequently built, and already described, but an older residence a little nearer to the mill, in which he resided in those days. On the walls were hung several good engravings, one of which particularly struck Jacob, being a plate representing the infant John Wesley saved from the flames of a burning house by a man on a ladder.

There were also represented striking events in the lives of the earlier ministers, Charles Wesley, Whitfield, and others, who, like Saint Paul, appeared to have been "in perils oft;" and there was a wonderful sheet of portraits comprising all the eminent men of the sect, from the time of their great founder down to a recent period, arranged in radiating lines around the quaint central bust of the pious little Oxford divine who first unintentionally raised their banner of Dissent. Mr. Slowman extended his index finger towards this engraving, which was inscribed "Worthies of Wesleyanism," and turning to Jacob, said—

"Wonderful men, sir—the salt of the earth. When shall we look upon their like again?—not, forsooth, in these degenerate days, when the rules and practice of our society are being sadly relaxed, and our faith is waxing cold. That was a great event, sir," he continued, pointing to the engraving depicting the rescue of the infant Wesley; "the prince of the power of the air did his worst there, sir, but could not prevail. Where would religion have been in this country, sir, had it been otherwise?"

Mr. Slowman was warming up to eloquence, but was suddenly interrupted.

"Do you take sugar in your tea, Mr. Grimshaw?" said Patty, now seated at the table, and anxious to create a diversion, to protect Jacob from a second sermon out of chapel.

Jacob was glad of her intervention, as it saved him from the necessity of answering Mr. Slowman's queries, which he imagined it was necessary to do, although that eloquent man, once he got a fair start and a good listener, would have run on in the interrogative form for an hour without expecting a reply.

Now that the minister was suddenly pulled up by Patty, he fell naturally into his lighter vein, and seated himself by the young lady at the tea-table.

"I am sure Mr. Grimshaw will not want anything to sweeten his tea from your hands, Miss Patty," he said gaily.

Jacob answered for himself, on the contrary, that he wished for "two lumps," and Patty handed him his tea sweetened in accordance with his request, without noticing Mr. Slowman's old-fashioned compliment. She helped that worthy man next, and made no useless inquiries as to his taste. She knew from long experience that he liked an abundance of sugar, and of all other good things, whenever he could get them, which was not very often. John Maltby added the quantity he desired for himself, and looked across the table at his friend in an expectant manner. The minister, who had been so dexterously interrupted by Patty, im-

mediately remembered he had not said grace, and, springing to his feet, poured forth a long benediction over the heads of the party, the length being specially increased as an atonement for his previous forgetfulness.

Patty was beginning to have fears for the vanishing heat of the tea, and to repent of her manœuvre, when one of her maids appeared to the rescue with a covered dish of beefsteaks in one hand, and of broiled ham and poached eggs in the other. The girl stopped when she entered the room, and remained reverently listening.

Now, Mr. Slowman was not so absorbed in his devotional exercises but that his eye could rest with affectionate expectation on those two cover-dishes. He had breakfasted early and scantily enough at home in the morning, and had tasted but little since ; he had been preaching and singing and praying for eight or ten hours ; he was accustomed to take a good deal of violent exercise in the pulpit, hitting out hard right and left when denouncing the unhappy reprobates whose turn it was to be so dealt with as a warning to others ; occasionally soaring aloft on tiptoe with up-raised hands, when leading his flock in the spirit to their final resting place above, or hanging perilously over the edge of the pulpit with his right hand pointing downwards to the other place, which he so often declared would be the eternal abode of such as repented them not ; and on this afternoon, as we have seen, he had exceeded a little on Jacob's account, and was more

than usually exhausted—therefore he suddenly terminated the grace, and turned with alacrity to the eatables, to which he was assisted by Mr. Maltby.

Jacob Grimshaw addressed himself to the task of helping Patty, who diligently kept up the supply of tea, and then for twenty minutes the pleasant rattle of knives and forks accompanied the genial conversation led by the host and Mr. Slowman.

The latter was now in his happiest vein. He told some amusing anecdotes of members of his flock, and handled their peculiarities with broad humour; he joked with Patty about the extra liberty she enjoyed during her mother's absence from home, and slyly hoped she would make a good use of it; and having made considerable havoc amongst the beefsteaks, as the more solid foundation of his meal, was inwardly debating with himself the wisdom of entering on the lighter subject of ham and eggs, when his quick ear detected the footsteps of his colleague on the doorstep.



CHAPTER X.

SILAS CLAYTON.

“ Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for power
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour ;
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
More bent to raise the wretched than to rise.”

GOLDSMITH.

THE Rev. Silas Clayton, like one who was borne dead on a bier and raised to life again in a city called Nain over eighteen hundred years ago, “was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.”

His father had died when he was very young, but this loss had been compensated for by the unusual devotion and care of his remaining parent, who, though in narrow circumstances, had pinched and saved, and watched and prayed, in order that he might be educated and devoted to the Wesleyan ministry, of which persuasion she had been all her life a consistent member. He had endeavoured to repay her care and self-denial by striving earnestly to accomplish the end she had in view, and after an inexpensive but sound English education in a country town, had “taken his Divinity lectures” under one of the leading lights of the denomi-

nation, and then entered heart and soul upon the duties of his calling. He was not gifted with great mental abilities, and his physical appearance was somewhat against him ; but in fervent zeal and earnest hard-working efforts for the spiritual good of those committed to his charge, he had but few equals amongst the brethren.

The itinerant system adopted by the founders of the Wesleyan Church, and still scrupulously adhered to, is no doubt beneficial to the younger ministers, as it gives them enlarged experiences of life, and brings them into contact with fresh and varying influences during successive changes from one circuit to another.

The nominal rule was, that the ministry should change in each circuit annually, but in practice it is extended to a three years' system. The additional expense and the particular discomfort entailed on the married ministers by constant changes of residence is a serious evil, and one calling loudly for reform ; but of all the forms of Dissent in existence, Wesleyanism is the most tenacious of its customs and practices.

The Lauderdale Circuit was a scattered one, and involved considerable locomotion on the part of the ministers. It was the first on which Silas Clayton had been engaged, and he was much beloved by the local Society ; he had now spent a year amongst them under the charge of Mr. Slowman, and the leaders had duly petitioned the Conference in order that both their shepherds might remain for the second and third years.

They were provided with one indifferent horse to aid them both in their journeyings, but the Rev. Abel

Slowman being addicted to reading in the saddle, had let him down so often, that it was perilous any longer to venture on his back ; consequently the younger minister generally preferred to walk. There were scoffers even in the Dale who stated that the brute had acquired from his masters a constant habit of falling on his knees to pray ; and certainly the knees of the animal and those of the trousers of his riders had a common point of resemblance in a whitish colour thereabouts, which was evidence of much contact with the ground on the part of all three.

It was on account of this weakness of the Society's steed that Mr. Clayton had to depend on his own legs for his movements on the Sunday evening referred to in the last chapter ; he had preached three sermons in three different places, and as some of the faithful would persist in following him about from one place of worship to another, he was thereby prohibited from repeating the same sermon twice over. He had also held several "prayer meetings" and met several "classes"—a term used when the members of the Society assemble together to narrate their "experience," receiving little printed tickets from the class leaders, testifying that they have duly attended, and have paid a penny a week as "class money," which, taken together, constitute the test of "membership." On this Sunday all the outlying duty had fallen to his share, and he had walked over a good deal of ground on very slight sustentation. It was, therefore, with a feeling of relief that he turned his face in the direction of Mr. Maltby's cottage, at the close of

his labours, in pleasant anticipation of the substantial repast he knew to be invariably provided in that hospitable abode, but in the still warmer hope of feasting his eyes on the features of John Maltby's pretty daughter. On this occasion his route lay over a steep hill, at the foot of which some brick works were in operation. The brickmakers engaged therein were a reckless, ignorant lot of men and women, and were looked upon as heathens or worse by the Dale people.

The young minister had gone amongst them and tried to induce them to come to chapel, or at least to listen to his exhortations at their homes.

In reply, they had asked him for "the price of a pot of beer all round," and finding him obdurate in refusal, and indeed unable to comply, owing to the slender state of his finances, even if he had been inclined to do so, they had jeered at him and driven him forth from their neighbourhood, threatening to send brickbats at his head if he came again.

He had knelt down then and there on the hillside, and prayed earnestly for them, "that this sin might not be laid to their charge," and determined he would visit them again when next in that part of the country, hoping that in the meantime their hearts might be changed; and although on the present occasion he was very hungry and tired, and feared he would be late for the pleasant evening meal at Mr. Maltby's, he felt that he could not now pass by without fulfilling his duty to his Master. Therefore, he approached the camping ground of the enemy once more, having some fear of

the threatened brickbats before his eyes, but prepared to do his best, and to face the worst.

As he drew near to the place, he observed a number of boys, the sons of the workmen and workwomen,—who were seldom or ever lawfully married, and were often difficult to distinguish as to sex, by dress or appearance or language,—engaged in their favourite pastime of “chuck-farthing,” in which occupation they spent their Sunday holiday, whenever the more interesting amusement of a “dog-fight” or a “main of cocks” was not on hand. He thought these lads were specially separated from their more hardened parents and placed in his road in order that he might do them good, and calling them around him, immediately pulled out his Testament and read them a chapter, to which they appeared to listen attentively, being astonished for the moment at the novelty of the proceeding, and in the expectation that some “conjuring” or possibly a distribution of halfpence would result.

When this was ended, he sang a hymn, first pitching his voice as usual with his inseparable tuning fork, which proceeding struck them as the beginning of the “conjuring,” and brought them all crowding round about him.

This performance concluded, he told them he would soon come again, and then prepared to go his way rejoicing. One of the biggest and dirtiest of the lads here stepped forward and rudely demanded “coppers,” but being made to understand with difficulty that Mr. Clayton’s gifts were spiritual and not carnal, inquired

of him with seeming earnestness whether he was bound for the Dale or not? On receiving an affirmative reply, the lad turned round to his companions and made a hideous grimace, to which they replied by closing an eye apiece. He then undertook to show the wearied gentleman a short cut, which he stated " 'ud saave a good two miles." Silas Clayton had always suspected there must be some other better path than that steep rough way over the hills which he had followed heretofore, and he readily accepted the proffered guidance of the boy with gratitude, as undoubted evidence of his having made some impression on these rough lads in his first effort. The urchin made strange motions behind his back with his thumbs, which were quickly understood by the dirty imps behind him, who allowed the young minister and his guide to proceed alone by the newly-discovered footpath which apparently led round the base of the hill. When they had travelled some distance, the boy intimated that if the gentleman continued right on in the track before him, he would soon come out close to his destination, and was rewarded for his assistance and advice with a penny and some good words; after which he flew back like the wind to his companions, and resumed with them the pastime in which they had been interrupted.

Poor Silas toiled on for a full hour in the same path, which was a muddy one, without any satisfactory result, seeing no appearance of the Dale, or of his expectant friend's cottage; and yet there had been no chance of error on his part—he had seen no

other path leading out of this one since the boy departed. At length he discovered by the position of the sinking sun that his progress was away from his destination instead of towards it, and in a few minutes he came again upon the spot on which he had read and sang to the young brickmakers, and beheld that juvenile community still engaged in their speculative operations, in which his penny had changed many times from one dirty pair of hands to another.

They received him with a shout and a kind of war dance, his quondam guide screaming above the others his congratulations on his safe circuit of the hill, the young vagabond having intentionally set him on a wrong path, as an extra amusement for his fellows and in revenge for supposed stinginess.

Silas perceived that he had been wilfully deceived, and proceeded with a sad heart and weary limbs on his original route, his faith in human nature, and especially in the nature of brickmakers, considerably shaken.

It was thus, dejected and weary, travel-stained and hungry, that he entered the cottage of Mr. Maltby, just in time for the last of the beefsteaks and other good things there provided, but with an overdue appetite, and a sense of depression to which his pale countenance bore evidence.

On the present occasion it has been noticed that Mrs. Maltby was not present at the entertainment; she had recently gone to Oxford to administer motherly counsel to her only son, Edward, who had creditably passed from an excellent public school to a college in the great centre of learning.

She had reluctantly consented to this course at his urgent request, with many misgivings and after much earnest, anxious prayer for guidance, having ever before her mind the picture of Oxford as it was in the days of the great founder of the Society, whose teaching and doctrines she loved, and who she believed had been much persecuted by the unrighteous Oxonians.

John Maltby had made no opposition whatever ; on the contrary, he rather favoured the proposal, and readily supplied the requisite funds. The welfare of his son and daughter was naturally very dear to him, and the thing he had most at heart in this world next to his love for his wife.

He had received but a limited education himself, and felt the disadvantage all his life ; he therefore determined that his children should have all the advantages in that line which money could give them, and he had sufficient reliance on his son's character to trust him with confidence even to a worse place than Oxford was then reputed to be amongst Dissenters.

He also relied much on the advice of the learned man in whose charge he had first placed the youth, who spoke of him in terms of praise, and strongly urged that he should be allowed to take his degree.

John Maltby was a consistent Wesleyan. He gave cheerfully and liberally of his means to the cause, and was none the poorer in consequence ; he was a regular attendant at chapel and at class meeting, where his happy, thankful spirit cheered many a desponding brother ; his house was always open to receive the

ministers, and many good things found their way from his well-stocked larder to the scantily supplied shelves of Mrs. Slowman, up at Lawley; but he was neither narrow-minded nor bigoted, and was ready to admit that good things could come out of Oxford as well as from other places. Indeed, when in strange cities on his business journeys, he generally went to the Established Church, or sat humbly under the minister of any other Protestant community of whom he heard a good report, and enjoyed the services equally well whether they were conducted by men in surplices and bands or by individuals clad in plain black cloth.

His Bible was his rule of faith, and he knew it almost by heart from cover to cover, but he never travelled without a Prayer Book, and was willing to admit all that could be demanded of him by the stoutest Churchman regarding that wonderful composition, always excepting the Athanasian Creed, which he invariably tore out.

With all this, he was spoken of in the Society as "rather lax," and he had been taken to task by a deputation from the leaders' meeting, and preached at by his friend and guest, Mr. Slowman, as to that going up to Oxford of his son. The preacher had taken for his text on that occasion, "Come out from among them and be ye separate," and had alluded strongly to touching pitch and other defilements, and also to the misfortunes and death of Eli, at which Mrs. Maltby had been much affected, and had sniffed and sobbed audibly before the congregation. Nevertheless, Edward Maltby

had gone to Magdalene College at his father's expense, and with his consent and blessing.

Good accounts had come of the young man from the dons and magnates of that venerable institution, and especially from his tutor. He had taken a prize for an essay, and passed his "little go" with credit, and when he returned to the paternal abode in the vacation he was cheerful and happy, although somewhat pale and thin; but it was noticed that he shrugged his shoulders at one of Mr. Slowman's finest passages as he sat in the family seat at chapel. It was also observed that he had twice excused himself from attendance on some slight plea, when that good man had specially prepared a sermon intended for his warning and edification; and, alas! he had been seen on the same Sunday entering the ivy-covered porch of the church at Lawley by one of Mr. Slowman's sharp-eyed daughters, left at home to mind the baby.

On the whole, the Society at Lauterdale shook its head about Edward Maltby's college education, and said, "no good would come of it;" but so long as his father subscribed so largely to the chapel funds, and was so liberal in gifts and hospitality to the ministers, it was deemed best to shut the Society's eyes to the evident "falling away."

Now, there was one man who would neither shut his eyes nor hold his peace, but who had decided to lift up his testimony against it, and that man was Silas Clayton. He had gravely consulted his superintendent on the subject, as a matter of duty, and had been affectionately

counselled to stay his hand. Mr. Slowman did not and could not approve of the matter, but he counselled prayer and supplication alone on behalf of the young man in danger. Silas wrestled much in prayer on his account, but his heart was hot within him, and he could not refrain any longer.

His very love for Patty added fuel to the fire that consumed him; he could not rest day or night whilst her brother, whom he hoped one day would be his brother also, remained unconverted and a “dweller in the city of the plain;” that was to say, in Oxford, whose teaching his soul abhorred, and thus he had at length run into collision with Edward Maltby, and had come off second-best in the encounter.

The young Oxford student could remain silent when he pleased, and could keep his temper in controversy, but Silas could do neither one nor the other. The former had a cool head, and perhaps a somewhat cold heart; the latter was on flame both in head and heart at once. Edward Maltby was already a trained and skilful logician, cunning at fence and apt at laying pitfalls for his adversary; Silas Clayton despised all reasoning in the face of revelation, and did not know when his arguments were reduced to absurdities.

The little polemical duel was fought out before the other members of the family one Sunday evening after a “good tea,” of which the Oxford student, who was rather ascetic in diet, scarcely partook at all. On that occasion Mrs. Maltby was borne away by the fiery eloquence

of the young minister, and his ready, fluent quotations from the only book he believed in or cared for; her husband, on the other hand, took pride and pleasure in the skill and casuistry of his son, even when he could not conscientiously agree with him; and as for the son himself, he came to the hasty conclusion that Silas Clayton was a hot-brained, shallow zealot, in which he did the young man much injustice. Zealous he was no doubt, but he was by no means shallow, and had in him the rare stuff of which saints and martyrs are made.

As for Patty, she loved them both pretty much in the same way, and tried to bridge over the chasm with the olive branches of peace; but however well she succeeded with Mr. Clayton, who would have gone barefoot to Jerusalem in her service, and could not bear malice in the slightest degree, and who really had his opponent's welfare at heart, she found her brother's opinion of Silas grew worse instead of better, and therefore she quietly dropped the subject.

Mrs. Maltby deeply revered, if she did not absolutely worship, the young minister; she believed that all he had said of that dreadful Oxford was gospel, or next to it, and that misfortune would come of the place sooner or later. Her dearest wish was, that her son should grow up such an one as Silas Clayton, and become a bright and shining light in the ministry of the Wesleyan Church, outside which she scarcely believed any one could be saved.

Her son so far agreed with her as to decide on adopt-

ing the profession of a clergyman, but privately determined that he would fight under the banner of the Establishment ; but for some time he wisely kept that resolution to himself, on the principle that “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” At length, however, he wrote her a letter from Oxford announcing his intention, which she secretly wept over, and then carried into her closet, and spread out, like Hezekiah, before the Lord. Afterwards, in silence, she had taken her departure from Lauterdale to see the writer face to face.



CHAPTER XI.

THE PERKS FAMILY.

“ This is the ancient stock by Wesley led—
They the pure body, he the reverend head ;
All innovation they with dread decline ;
Their John the elder was the John divine :
Hence—still their moving prayer, the melting hymn,
The varied accent, and the active limb.”

CRABBE.

IT was on account of the absence of her mother at Oxford that Patty Maltby presided at the tea-table, and did the honours so gracefully on the occasion referred to in the last chapter. The conversation had been light and cheerful during the meal. Mr. Slowman was actually brilliant as he imbibed his fourth cup of tea when his tired and dejected junior made his appearance. Somehow, his advent acted as a damper on the rising spirits of the party. He was unusually silent and unusually late, and he looked very wearied and unhappy. Hitherto Silas Clayton had generally contrived on Sunday evenings to be the first to reach Rose Cottage, which was the name of Mr. Maltby's pretty residence, and was rewarded for his extra punctuality by a nice half hour with Patty alone in

the garden, in which he had what our American cousins call "a good time."

They discoursed on those occasions on the practicability of improving the singing at the chapel, and of the difficulty experienced with one Perks, who, although a pious young man and devoted to the cause, had a voice which much resembled the lowing of a cow in distress; also of the still greater difficulty existing with Mrs. Perks, whom Perks had married chiefly on account of his admiration for her musical acquirements, and who had a habit of "scooping up" at the end of verses, and invariably sang dreadfully out of tune; further of the utter hopelessness of reforming Miss Perks, the unmarried sister of the aforesaid, aged twenty-six and upwards, who used "grace notes and twirls," and whose shrill pipe was always distinctly heard throughout the chapel when every other voice was taking "three bars rest;" or, as Patty very correctly described it, "Miss Perks was unfortunately addicted to skirling." Patty had been taught to play the piano, and to sing from music, and she had a sweet clear voice, and good taste in using it. Her father had recently purchased for her a good instrument, at that time an expensive luxury, and one rarely seen in the houses of strict Wesleyans.

Silas Clayton was an enthusiast about sacred music. Thus between the two young persons there was a common subject of interest; but Mr. Slowman had set his face against all innovations in this line, and condemned the harmonium presented to the chapel by Mr. Maltby

to remain in the chilling privacy of the large classroom, where it was used in the "musical exercises" to which Patty had invited Jacob Grimshaw. Now, in order to subdue the exuberant melody of the Perks family, and if possible to mitigate their peculiarities, Patty had induced her mother to invite them, with other neighbours who were members of the society, to join the Sabbath evening reunions at Rose Cottage; and so when the wants of her guests had been satisfied—an easy task that evening, so far as Silas Clayton was concerned—Patty retired to the cheerful little drawing-room, and the companionship of her piano, there to await and receive her friends who had been invited to close the evening with prayer and praise, in which profitable occupation many of them had spent every hour of the day excepting the short intervals devoted to meals—old Wesleyans as a rule being absolute cormorants in the line of prayer meetings on Sunday, and finding neither pleasure nor profit in any other employment.

Job Perks was simply a foreman blacksmith, in the employ of the Dale Company. He was a hardworking, industrious, but rather stupid-looking young man, over six feet in height, with a very rough bullet-shaped head, large ears and mouth, and huge hands and feet, which indicated a tendency to his further development in size and strength as he advanced in years.

He worked in a separate forge at the foot of the Dale, near the company's wharves, and his business was to weld the scrap iron brought up, as a return freight, by

the barges from Bristol, into "faggots and bars" for use in the works.

For this purpose he had in the building in which he laboured a huge old-fashioned tilt-hammer, the helve of which, weighing about a ton, was attached to a large wooden spring beam raised by water-power. He was paid by contract for his work, and made a good thing of it; but there were few of the Dale workmen who cared for the situation, even with all its emoluments—firstly, because the forge was isolated from the works; and secondly, because those who worked constantly at the "tilt," and heard its dull heavy thuds on the anvil block all day long, invariably became deaf. Job Perks was not *very* deaf as yet, but was said to be "rather hard of hearing," and perhaps that fact would account for his exceptional liking for the high "skirling" of his wife and sister, whose voices he could not otherwise have heard so well. Perks was a steady-going member of the Society, regular in his attendance, "earnest in the cause," jealous of innovations, willing to subscribe liberally of his means to the support of the ministry, according as the Giver of all good had blessed him, and determined to have his money's worth out of the ministers on all occasions. He could read very little himself, but he delighted in listening to the shrill voice of his sister, after working hours, in the evening in his cottage, when she screamed into his ear passages from such books as "Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress," "Law's Serious Call," or the sermons of Mr. Wesley, which, with the "Missionary Notices" in many

volumes, constituted his library. It was, perhaps, on this account that Miss Perks had remained a fixture in the family, and thus she repaid the food and raiment supplied to her by her brother. She was an angular-looking woman, with a painfully pious and rather melancholy aspect, always clad in seedy black, and having a weedy washed-out appearance. The chief delight of her life was to invent puzzling theological problems for the ministers; such as inquiries into the ultimate fate of the particular pillar of salt into which Lot's wife was converted, or as to the feelings of the unfortunate whale upon whom Jonah was quartered for three days and nights, without fire or food or candlelight; and with these weighty matters on her mind she would make journeys on foot up to Lawley, and seek private interviews with Mr. Slowman, whom failing, she would apply to Silas Clayton as second-best opinion on the momentous questions at issue. If Silas could bring himself to hating any one, it certainly would have been Miss Perks; and on this Sunday evening, when he had been misled by that young vagabond brickmaker, and had lost his appetite and his dinner and tea together, his Christian temper was destined to further trials at her hands in the drawing-room of Rose Cottage, where the Perks family, clad in their "go-to-meeting best clothes," were now assembled, with several worthy members of the society, to hear some "further spiritual counsel" from Mr. Slowman and his colleague ere they retired to rest.

On this occasion the gentlemen did not join the

ladies in the drawing-room as punctually as usual. Patty endeavoured to amuse the meeting in the meantime by playing over a piece of sacred music, painfully acquired by many hours' practice at school ; but thereby she incurred the special displeasure of the Perks family, who had come to an unanimous vote in their own abode, ere they set out from thence, that on this evening they would make a decided stand, and rebel against the new tunes and the musical teaching of Mr. Clayton, and would sing the hymns according to the ancient manner and custom as understood by them and others who had been in the Dale before Mr. Clayton or Miss Maltby were born, and hoped to be there after them.

Meanwhile a slight discussion on the same subject was being carried on in the parlour between Mr. Slowman and his colleague. Rumours of the displeasure of the leaders and older members had been borne to the ears of the superintendent, and on one occasion in the very chapel itself the old hands and the new pupils had an unseemly struggle for the mastery in "raising the hymn,"—one party, led by the Perks faction, starting with "a lively measure," the other with a solemn slow tune recently introduced. The "lively measure" being something like the Canadian Boat Song at the double, was easily joined in by the majority, and of course soon extinguished the rival melody, but not without a struggle, and the discord thus produced had alarmed Mr. Slowman, who was now speaking like a father to Silas on the subject. At another time the young minister would have bowed his

head in gentle submission ; but on the present occasion his wounded spirit chafed against the seeming interdict of the superintendent, and there was evidence of a slight conflict of opinion in the drawn rigid muscles of his face, and the light in his eyes, when he entered the drawing-room.

Silas Clayton had lean jaws and a rather large mouth, with very prominent teeth. When his spirit was excited or vexed, he had a habit of drawing back his thin lips, and exposing his large white teeth in two formidable rows. Before he commenced his most powerful and thrilling sermons—and occasionally he preached like one inspired—he had a trick of throwing back his head and turning it slowly from side to side, so as to note the particular souls who sat under him, with especial reference to their individual comfort or warning in his address.

His face wore an affectionate smile as his eyes swept slowly through the chapel. Cynical people said they rested last and most lovingly on John Maltby's pew ; but be that as it may, on such occasions he was at his best, and the congregation knew and felt it. On this evening his teeth were out, and his head thrown back, as he strode into the room, but the smile was wanting. Mr. Slowman followed with the troubled aspect of one who feels thunder in the air. Mr. Maltby detained Jacob in the parlour for a few minutes on private affairs.

Mr. Maltby was in the position of the Scotch cattle dealer who abhorred Sunday trading, but was tempted occasionally to open a bargain with a neighbour

returning from the kirk with the phrase, "supposing it was Monday." He never did business of any kind on Sunday, but on the present occasion he wanted to speak to Jacob on a matter of importance, and also to inquire into the young man's present occupation with a view to his benefit, on the principle that a certain nameless personage would look after him and his idle hands if not forestalled; and with the latter motive uppermost, yet with some compunctions, he opened the conversation thus:—

"Jacob, my young friend, what are you about these days—work or play, lad, eh?"

"Thou art aware, no doubt, that the mill is stopped in consequence of my father's lawsuit with the Dale Company," replied Jacob. "In his absence I can find no work to do; our books are all made up, and the mill is empty, and idle like myself."

"A bad business, lad," said Mr. Maltby; "how long does your father mean to keep down the sluices?"

"Until he has obtained justice from the Court," replied Jacob in a decided tone.

"That I fear will be neither before nor after Christmas, my friend," said Mr. Maltby, with a little severity. "Your father did a bad day's work when he took counsel of that man Quetchett, and I fear the case will not come out of Chancery until your head and mine are grey, lad, if we live to see it. Is there any use in speaking to him as a friend?" he inquired; "and when is he likely to return home again?"

"Truly I know not," said Jacob, sadly; "he is in

London, and writes but seldom, but he says he will not start the mill again until he has obtained a decree. I wish that he had not so hastily decided as to the mill; for, as thou sayest, a decision may be far off, and justice is slow at best, and father is a man who changeth not. It has caused me much perplexity, and I would I had some useful employment if it were but to occupy my mind."

John Maltby had now obtained all the information he required. First, as to the mill, so long as it remained idle, flour would be scarce in the Dale, and would be an article he might profitably invest in; therefore he made a mental note, with a slight twinge of conscience, that, "supposing it was Monday," he would order a fresh supply from Bristol—a resolution he carried out before eight o'clock next morning, when three of his largest barges were ordered to drop down the river for special cargoes.

Before he closed the conference he turned his good-natured thoughts to the perplexed young man before him, and the necessity of intercepting the active enemy of souls in his case, and said kindly, "Give me a call early to-morrow morning, Jacob; we must find thee something to do, lad." He then laid his hand on the young man's shoulder and gently pushed him towards the drawing-room, from whence the first lines of the opening hymn were issuing, and to John Maltby's practised ear they sounded as if there was something wrong.

On entering the room, which was well lit, Jacob perceived a number of strangers assembled, each one holding a thick red hymn-book.

Patty was seated at the piano, and had her back to

him. Silas Clayton stood beside her ready to turn over the leaves of the music, and rather ignoring the malcontents seated stiffly round the walls. The first start had been a failure; the Perks family had hung back, and then commenced together in a different key when the rest were well away. Confusion first and silence afterwards were the results. At this moment John Maltby and his young friend entered, and the latter took a seat near the door, somewhat dazzled by the lights, after the darkness of the room they had left, and feeling a little out of place and embarrassed. Mr. Slowman rejoiced at the appearance of the host, whose strong mellow voice and cheerful manner would, he hoped, lead the assembly into good temper. He therefore read the first verse again, and Mr. Maltby sang it with a will, standing in the centre of the room, and beating time with his right hand. The Perks party were for the moment overawed and silent; to beard the master of the house on his own drawing-room carpet was more than they dared so early in the evening, and thus the first hymn was got through successfully. After this came a chapter in the Bible, read by Silas, who unfortunately chose the fourth of the Epistle of Saint James to the Twelve Tribes scattered abroad, commencing, "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" The face of Perks, who had looked out the place in his own pocket Bible, wore an ominous frown; Miss Perks nudged her sister-in-law violently in the side, to call her attention to the special chapter selected. Mr. Slowman speedily interposed with

prayer, and diverted the thoughts of his hearers once more by allusions to "the lost sheep;" but when they looked up to see the effect of the exordium on the animal in question, it was perceived he had taken advantage of his position near the door to slip quietly away—a step which led to an immediate reference to "deaf adders," after which they were all evidently thrown back on the original difficulty as to the singing.

It was now Mr. Clayton's turn to select the hymn. He gave out, "O for a thousand tongues to sing," and pronounced in a firm decided voice the word "French," as the key to the measure, of which Patty struck the first few chords. Miss Perks audibly uttered "Martyrs," and both sides set off on their own hooks, with opposition tunes. There are no two Methodist airs which differ more essentially in style than those quoted above; violent discord was the result. Patty ceased to play; John Maltby flushed up to the eyes, and frowned at Miss Perks as the open leader of the opposition. Silas Clayton's teeth were dangerously prominent. Mr. Slowman crossed the room to say a word of remonstrance in the ear of Perks, who immediately became altogether deaf. The superintendent then looked appealingly to Silas, and said aloud, "Let it be 'Martyrs.'" Patty played the new tune, and the Perks faction sang, but this time Miss Maltby and Silas remained silent; her father occasionally joined in the singing, but with a bewildered, puzzled air, and it gradually died out a lingering death. An exhortation followed in due order from Mr. Maltby as a class leader; it was pithy

and short, but contained no allusion to the present discord. Brother Perks was now called on to pray; in this way Mr. Slowman endeavoured to throw a sop to Cerberus. Perks prayed loudly "that the flock might not be led astray by their shepherds, but might be able to cling even to the horns of the altar." His language was wild and excited, and was evidently meant for Silas Clayton's special benefit.

A brother, named Beardmore, who was also a class leader, followed in a milder tone, in the hope of throwing oil on the troubled waters, but still he spoke in the language of protest against innovations.

The last hymn was now given out with fear and trembling by Mr. Slowman. The tune was "Devizes," in which the female voices have four bars all to themselves. Now was the time for Mrs. and Miss Perks; their grace notes and twirls were superabundant. They repeated the last lines of each verse twice over with exuberant delight and wonderful variations. Patty closed the piano in despair; the click of the lock sounded loudly in the room. The voices of the Perks females rose high in a triumphant final "skirl," and Silas Clayton thrust his fingers into his ears.

When there was no longer any possibility of prolonging the manifold repetitions of the last verse, Job Perks withdrew his hat from beneath his chair and turned him to the door, followed by his women-kind, who forgot, in their haste and triumph, to wait for the final benediction of the elder minister.

They journeyed home in silence.

Unhappy Perks, when out in the cool air of the Dale, was not altogether easy in mind as to the part he had taken, and his wife was already repenting of her share in the performance; but Miss Perks was in a highly combative condition; she had subdued and conquered the enemy, and would henceforth "skirl" as loudly as she pleased in chapel or elsewhere.

When they entered their family kitchen, where, although it was the middle of summer, a huge coal fire was burning brightly in the grate—a thing deemed essential to comfort by the Dale salamanders—Mrs. Perks was already shedding the tears of repentance, but received no sort of sympathy from her defiant sister-in-law. The evening's worship, such as it was, had been a failure, and the Maltbys had been insulted in their own house. Mrs. Perks sobbingly announced her intention of calling on Miss Patty next morning, and humbly apologising for the unseemly contest; but Miss Perks snapped her fingers viciously as she took her bedroom candle and ascended the narrow staircase to her virtuous couch, audibly announcing as a parting shot her private opinion that Miss Patty was "a conceited *minx*." The Perks family and those who aided and abetted them that evening were invited no more to the Sunday evening "reunions" at the cottage, at which Mrs. Maltby, having the wear and tear of her best carpet before her eyes, rejoiced secretly when she heard it by letter at Oxford. Silas Clayton ceased his efforts to reform the singing at the Dale chapel, which thenceforth resumed its original character, "*and so remaineth to this day.*"

CHAPTER XII.

THE PHILANTHROPIST.

“Yearning for the large excitement that the coming years would yield,
Eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father’s field ;

* * * * *

And his spirit leaps within him to be gone before him then,
Underneath the light he looks at, in among the throngs of men.”

TENNYSON.

IT will be gathered from the last chapter but one that there was a slight domestic trouble in the small house at the foot of the Dale as to the “falling away” of the eldest hope of the little family, in consequence of the decision of Edward Maltby at Oxford to enter the Church. It is singular that about the same time there was a more serious trouble in the large house at the head of the Dale of a somewhat similar character ; and in both cases a matter which in itself was harmless, if not absolutely praiseworthy, was aggravated by prejudice or pride into serious dimensions.

Joshua Field had one only son, named Robert after his wife’s father. There had been other sons born to him, but they had died in childhood or infancy. This seemed to be invariably the lot of the family ; they left

but few heirs to inherit their great wealth. The children were always weak and feeble, but those who survived the maladies and medicines of childhood generally grew up to be robust, active men and women, and lived to a good old age.

Robert Field was a weak, sickly infant, watched over with intense solicitude, guarded carefully from the winds of heaven, duly saturated with calomel and other noxious drugs by the local Galen, as the custom then was, on the appearance of the slightest symptom of infantile illness. Fenced round from all dangerous association with other children as he grew into boyhood, and taught in the wisdom of the Friends as he advanced into youth, all under his father's strict supervision, aided by occasional lessons from his Uncle Jediah, who really loved the boy as his own son;—nevertheless, when he reached the period of manhood, he was discovered to be the reverse of all that might be expected of him from such careful training; vigorous in constitution, despite of the apothecary; social and lively in temperament, despite the chilling cordon drawn round him as a child; and broad in his religious opinions, despite the narrow teaching of his uncle and the Friends.

How had all this come to pass? Was the youth a changeling; or had the Fields arrived at the summit of perfection in the previous generation, and was this the first symptom of moral perversity and decay? The elders of the sect in Lauterdale took it seriously to heart, and turned it over in their minds day and night,

and finally decided "it was all due to his mother;" and perhaps the elders were right.

Mrs. Field never was and never could be a strict Friend; she was far too good herself and of too fine clay for such every-day vessels as were in use in the Society's service. She loved "the good, the beautiful, and true" wherever they were to be found, whether under the drab coat of Elder Nathan, or the black one of the earnest Vicar of Lawley; she was a woman much in advance of her sex amongst Friends, and still more in advance of her husband, and consequently was not appreciated in her lifetime as she should have been; but she rejoiced greatly to think that the witness to her life and teaching and character, so misunderstood by those around her, would be the son who would one day reign in Lauterdale as head of the great house, free from the prejudices of his forefathers, endowed with their wealth, and with the knowledge and inclination necessary to make good use of it; gentle as a woman in disposition, and loving peace as much as the owner of the broadest beaver in the sect, yet brave as a Paladin, and willing to do battle for the right as readily as any warrior who ever wore steel helmet.

Tutors had been provided for him in every branch of useful learning, but he had never undergone the strict discipline which a public school alone can impart. He was therefore apt to be absorbed by the particular study of the hour, at the expense of his general progress. He was also liable to be run away with by hobbies of all kinds; at one time ardent in the

pursuit of astronomy with Josiah Morris ; at another, delighting the heart of Uncle Jediah by his diligent researches into the favourite studies of that astute critic, for which he exhibited remarkable proclivities at an early age, having a ready faculty in acquiring languages, which was said to have been evinced by members of the family in former times.

In one thing he differed essentially from all his predecessors, and especially from his father and his uncle ; he exhibited no taste whatever for business, and openly expressed a dislike for the pursuit of a manufacturing business such as theirs.

This was a matter of grave moment, considering the fact that upon his shoulders must ultimately devolve the weight of the whole concern, if a member of the family were to remain at the head of affairs, as had hitherto been the case during many generations. It was this decided aversion to trade which caused alarm amongst the elders, and was an especial source of grief and anxiety to his father and uncle.

At this crisis he unfortunately lost the stay and guide of his youth by the death of his mother. Mrs. Field caught a severe inflammatory cold in performing one of the many acts of mercy which formed a part of her daily life amongst the families of the workmen, and was suddenly removed hence ere her husband was fully aware that she was in danger. He mourned over his great loss in the undemonstrative manner of the Friends, and her place and memory remained sacred with him for the rest of his days. Joshua Field never fully

understood the beauty of his wife's character, but he had the good sense to recognise the fact that it was something above and beyond his comprehension, and so to venerate it as a thing sacred.

The blow to his son Robert, then about twenty-three years of age, was severe indeed; it seemed at first as if part of his own soul were removed. His mother alone understood him, and was the only person with whom he took counsel in his many perplexities of mind. Between her clear understanding and his searching, active intellect there had been always the most perfect sympathy, and in heart and soul they were in the fullest accord. Her last words and sudden death made a deep impression on his mind, and for many weeks he remained alone in his room in silent meditation, communing with his own heart after the manner of his people.

In those bitter days of repressed grief his plastic character was somewhat consolidated, and its erratic elements reduced to better harmony and order. Hitherto he had been a dreamer and an enthusiast. Now he was determined there should be a purpose in his life, an object ever before him worthy of his highest efforts, and that object was to be universal philanthropy.

Those were days in which the deeds and writings of such men as Howard, Buxton, and Wilberforce had at length found an echo in many hearts; the reform of prisons, the emancipation of slaves, the erection of hospitals, the promotion of temperance, the cause of education, freedom of religion, universal peace on

earth and goodwill toward men. Such subjects as these were occupying the minds of good men everywhere in England.

Robert Field woke up from his long reverie, eager to put on his armour and go forth to wage battle in one and all of the great questions of the day ; but to his father and his uncle his views and intentions were those of a vain dreamer. They were ready and willing to subscribe liberally of their wealth to any of the objects he had at heart, and, indeed, had always done so ; but to send forth as an apostle the sole remaining representative of their great house, whose hand should grasp the helm and steer the good old ship when they could no longer command, was a course which they would not and could not bring themselves to entertain or countenance. The young man, in his excited state of mind, chafed restlessly against their opposition, and in the first fervour of his zeal he resented the interference of elders of the sect injudiciously brought to bear on him by his relatives. He determined to go forth to hear in some other church the truths which he believed were warped and twisted by the narrow teaching of the Friends.

Joshua Field was by no means wanting in sagacity. He knew that in a case like his son's, opposition would add fuel to the fire, and therefore he planned for him a course of travel. Hitherto the young man had seen nothing of the world which he was so anxious to reform. The male Fields had been always brought up at home, and placed in the counting-house early in

life, in order that they might be imbued with a grave sense of responsibility. This course had hitherto succeeded perfectly. The brothers themselves had thus been bound to the desk, and advanced by regular steps to their proper places in the executive, and ultimately to the management of the business. But this youth abhorred the polished mahogany, and would have none of it. He despised profit and loss, and money-getting in any way, and believed the time had come to render an account of the great wealth with which Providence had endowed them, and that his special vocation would be to disseminate it for the benefit of mankind.

Of one thing he unfortunately took no account—that there were duties as imperative nearer home: a large army of workmen to be wisely controlled for their own good; a great business to be maintained, if not for the sake of wealth alone, for the sake of the people dependent upon it for bread. He might have been as much of a philanthropist as he pleased, and still have had a vast field for his labours at Lauterdale within the limits of the Company's property. But unfortunately this field appeared to him to be too small, and too much associated with money-getting for his exalted views; and so he determined he would go forth as a knight-errant of benevolence to grapple with some great evil in the outer world, and to overcome it—to spend and be spent in some great work.

There were evils enough in existence amongst the people not far from his own door, and still more in the

neighbouring "Black Country." The majority of the colliers were ignorant and brutal, the workpeople of both sexes, in the potteries and brickyards, were almost degraded to the level of beasts, and their children were worse savages than those of the Sandwich Islands. But hitherto his acquaintance with the labouring population had lain chiefly amongst the skilled workmen engaged in the Dale Works, who were a superior class, and as a rule were members of some Dissenting body, whose ministers looked pretty well after them.

The close seclusion in which he had been brought up in the Dale House prevented him from acquiring any accurate knowledge of the condition of the great population of the mineral districts within a radius of fifty miles of his own house, whilst his reading of the pamphlets then teeming from the press, supported by the Friends in England, brought close home to him the knowledge of suffering amidst the sugar-canes of Jamaica, of cruelties practised on the Gold Coast of Africa, of suffocating tortured slaves on board ships fitted out by Christians for the accursed traffic in the colonies, and of the horrors of convict life in Norfolk Island. He saw all these great distant wrongs, magnified by the distance itself, and burned to set out on the path to combat and redress them. In fact, he desired to be a philanthropist of the largest type, such as the men who were then rousing the nation to good works, and devoting their means and lives to the cause they advocated.

There was one man who understood him, and sought

to turn his wide sympathies into channels of immediate usefulness at home, and so to prevent the utter separation from his father's concerns and the personal conflict of opinion with his uncle which was likely to ensue from his present course. Chance had brought Robert Field into contact with one of the best men who has ever adorned the ministry of the English Church.

John Fletcher, Vicar of Lawley, was a scholar and a gentleman, at the same time a devoted Christian and a zealous clergyman—a man of refined tastes, possessed of a large heart and a guileless spirit.

Amongst the rich and the poor he laboured earnestly with the same object in view, and his labour was an acknowledged success. Men who were proof against the solemn warnings of Mr. Slowman or the fiery eloquence of Silas Clayton—and there were many such in Lawley—had been reached by the living sermon preached by the life and conversation of the good Vicar.

Rough colliers and still rougher forgemen and puddlers raised their hats reverently and ceased from labour as he passed amongst them, and their wives and children at home felt happier the day his shadow fell upon their threshold.

“At his approach complaint grew mild ;
And when his hand unbarr'd the shutter,
The clammy lips of fever smiled
The welcome which they could not utter.”

The Friends in Lauterdale, as a body, were some-

what antagonistic to the Established Church and its servants. In those days there was a silly sectarian controversy raging between two journals, which professed to be the organs of the parties at issue. But the elders, with one exception, honestly respected the Vicar of Lawley as a man above reproach; and, unfortunately, the exception was Jediah Field.

The Vicar wrote a little occasionally for the *Church Controversialist*, as a relaxation from his labours, and also to keep up his scholastic habits.

Like Jediah Field, he was a keen critic in Biblical literature, and he had felt it his duty to demolish a pet theory advanced by the learned ironmaster, and to refute one of his favourite crotchets in print.

A weak place had escaped the Quaker scholar in an elaborate article he had written and published, and the Vicar had sent a shaft through the joints of his harness.

Jediah Field looked on Mr. Fletcher's masterly refutation of his thesis as a personal injury, more especially as his nephew and pupil sided with the Vicar, and even went so far as to abandon the meeting of the Friends, and regularly attend the Church services at Lawley—to which place, about four miles up the valley, he publicly walked twice every Sunday, and thus unwittingly brought upon himself the silent displeasure of his reserved father, in addition to the more outspoken anger of his uncle.

Despite of this, he held his own course, and pursued his usual Sunday walk, and in so doing became ac-

quainted with a fellow-pedestrian, bound on the same errand, in the person of Edward Maltby, for whom he ultimately conceived an ardent friendship and esteem, and whose advanced opinions strengthened and confirmed his own.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE VICAR.

“ At church with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools who came to scoff remained to pray.”

GOLDSMITH.

THE appearance of the two young men in the church at Lawley soon attracted the attention of the Vicar, and although neither of them resided within the strict boundary of his parish, he was not long in cultivating their acquaintance.

The vicarage was close to the old church, and was a pretty residence, overlooking the little River Lauter, which was clear and bright in this part of the valley, and tumbled over curiously-worn limestone rocks into deep pools and tiny fretted caves.

A pleasant footpath, bordered with shady trees, led from the Dale Works by the side of the stream up to Lawley, and passed through a portion of the vicarage grounds. By this longer but prettier route the two friends frequently returned home together, and on this path one summer Sunday evening, when lingering a

little, they were purposely waylaid by Mr. Fletcher, who hospitably invited them into his house, and there introduced them to his daughters, Martha and Rachel, both of whom were under twenty years of age, and formed his whole family then resident at home.

The Vicar's only son was in the Church, and had recently gone out as a missionary to India. His beloved wife was dead, and buried in the little church-yard, within the shadow of the old spire, and he passed daily by her resting-place, with bowed, uncovered head, as he proceeded to his labour of love amongst his people. His daughters were the comfort and glory of his life, and were active partakers in his work. They were both beautiful girls, with the special beauty of breeding, and the fine chiselled features which tell of a long line of intellectual and well-bred ancestry. The Fletchers were ever a race of scholars, whose names had filled many a line in the records of literature, and with whom learning and piety in the men, and beauty and goodness in the women, were almost an inheritance.

To a man of the temperament, age, and acquirements of Robert Field, such novel companionship as that of the Vicar and his daughters was absolutely delightful, more especially in contrast with the dull monotony of his life in the Dale House since his mother's death. The fact that Mr. Fletcher had cheerfully given his only son as a servant of the Cross in foreign lands, raised the old man at once to a high place in his estimation; whilst the graceful manners

and pleasant conversation of the Vicar's daughters, and their warm sympathy with the great objects in which he was then so deeply interested, shone by comparison with the severe formality and limited ideas of the female "Friends" of his acquaintance.

In truth, he could scarcely have fallen on a pleasanter place, or on safer ground, than in Mr. Fletcher's home, wherein he shortly became a constant visitor, in spite of the sour looks of his uncle, who seemed to keep strict watch over his nephew's movements.

Edward Maltby was equally pleased with the family, and during the vacation holidays he frequently accompanied Robert Field in his visits to the vicarage, and called once or twice with his sister, whom the young ladies at Lawley desired to see oftener, and would have made much of, had it not been that Mrs. Maltby became alarmed. Fearing the withdrawal of her ewe lamb from the Wesleyan fold, she contrived to limit the acquaintance to mere formal greetings whenever the young girls met; much to the vexation of Patty and the chagrin of her son, who hoped, by means of the Vicar's influence and that of his daughters, to weaken his sister's regard for the Methodists, and so lessen Silas Clayton's chances.

Patty discovered very soon, with the quick instinct of her sex, that her brother secretly admired Miss Fletcher, perhaps before he was fully aware of the fact himself; and as he evidently had a strong leaning to the Church of England, she was not sorry to think that if he went over at all he would go over to such

good company; for all men and women in Lauterdale, whether Dissenters or Friends, spoke well of the young ladies at the Grange. For the present she wisely kept her shrewd little suspicion to herself, which was a course eminently calculated to save her mother from what was called in the household "a comfortable trouble," Mrs. Maltby being a woman who never got on well without a small stock of domestic grievances on hand.

It never occurred to any one in Lauterdale that Mr. Robert Field, the heir to the Dale property, and probable inheritor of the accumulated wealth of the family, was at all likely to fall in love with, and marry, a poor clergyman's daughter. Indeed it would have created a sensation equal to a social earthquake had such a thing been barely hinted at; and although he was known to be a young man very likely to please himself and to rebel against conventional precedent, no one dreamt it meant anything when he was seen so often by the side of Rachel Fletcher on the shady footpath by the river at Lawley. Of all men, the good Vicar was the last to see anything serious in the constant attentions of Mr. Field to his youngest daughter. He was pleased with the young man's enthusiastic character and goodness of heart, and endeavoured to tone down and direct his energies into objects of home usefulness, such as came every day within the sphere of his own observation. He knew that in birth and education he himself was equal, if not superior, to any of the men of the great firm, past and present;

but the Fields had ruled so long at Lauterdale, they were so rich and powerful, and so fenced round by the accessories of wealth, besides being members of an exclusive sect, that they had come to be regarded as a family with whom no one in the neighbourhood would presume to think of an alliance.

The idea that the gentle blue-eyed girl, just barely turned seventeen, whom he had not yet ceased to think of as a mere child, the youngest and fairest of his little flock, who, although he had taught her Greek and Latin, and many other things seldom learnt by girls in those days, was still esteemed by him as a mere plaything, whose merry winning ways he hoped were to be the solace of his evenings for many years to come,—that she should one day become “Queen of the Dale,” as the brides of the eldest sons of the family were always called in the district, and so rule in the great house, was a dream which never entered his wise old head, and would have startled him had it been hinted at. But one morning, when Robert Field had known the family about four months, the Vicar was destined to receive a shock from the unexpected presence of that impetuous youth in his study, who endeavoured with some difficulty to make the good man understand that he came as a humble suitor to crave the hand of his youngest daughter.

The announcement caused Mr. Fletcher much grave anxiety. To him it seemed at first to be some sudden fancy, which would vanish as rapidly as it had formed. He therefore hesitated for a few days to give any

answer at all, leaving Robert Field in a state of extreme perturbation, during which he begged repeatedly for a favourable response. Mr. Fletcher at length deemed it right to lay the proposal before the young man's father, and betook himself to the Dale House on that errand, having previously written a graceful little note to solicit an interview; to which had come a formal reply in three lines, intimating that Joshua Field would await him on the day and hour named.

Mr. Fletcher was received coldly, but with civility, by the heads of the family, consisting of the two brothers and their sister Rebecca, assembled in grim silent conclave in the library to hear his communication.

The young suitor had already broken the matter to his father by letter, and had then gone away in much excitement for a short excursion amongst the Welsh hills, leaving an address to which the reply was to be sent.

"I have ventured to call," said the Vicar, speaking very carefully, and addressing himself to Joshua Field, "with reference to a matter which I am sure affects all of us very nearly, which has come very suddenly on me, and caused me much perplexity. I have no doubt your esteemed son has himself made some communication to you on the subject, and therefore you will comprehend the position in which I am placed, and why I have sought this interview."

Joshua Field gravely bowed his head. His brother

and sister remained stiff and silent. The lady appeared to be intently contemplating something in the pattern of the carpet. The keen restless eyes of Jediah Field scanned the clergyman from head to foot as if studying the bodily presence of the man who had penned the famous "Refutation," and laid open the weak places in his pungent attack on the English Church, in which he had sought to demolish the Thirty-nine Articles, and to prove the Prayer Book to be a tissue of traditions tainted with Popery.

The Vicar paused for some reply at the end of his little speech, but finding that he was expected to continue, and would receive no assistance from these silent people, he renewed the theme with an earnest expression of truthfulness in his voice.

"I have been favoured," he said, still addressing the elder brother, "by a proposal for the hand of my youngest daughter Rachel, recently made to me by your son. I need scarcely say that it came to me altogether as a surprise."

Jediah Field here smiled sarcastically, and looked askance at the speaker, who instantly detected the doubt expressed by the facial muscles of the younger brother.

The Vicar's voice instantly assumed a more decided tone. "I have lost no time," he continued, "in seeking an interview with the young man's family, to learn their feeling on so important a proposal, and to explain that in the event of such an alliance being disapproved by them, they will have such assistance as it

may be right and proper in me to give in discountenancing it. But should it be otherwise, it will give me great pleasure indeed to accept as a son-in-law one for whom I entertain feelings of deep regard. At the same time, my daughter is very young, and Mr. Field is somewhat unsettled; so that, under any circumstances, I must stipulate for some considerable interval before I can consent to part with her—indeed, I may say with truth that it would have pleased me better had this proposal been delayed for several years to come.”

The Vicar had now said his say, and was determined to wait for some reply from the silent triumvirate before he would speak another word; but as he was not accustomed to the ways of the Friends, when assembled in family council, he felt hurt and somewhat puzzled at the “awful pause” of three or four minutes which ensued.

The “spirit moved” the lady first. She commenced suddenly in a feeble voice, trembling in its quaint cadences, as if with some great fear, although it was merely the ordinary manner of speech adopted by elderly Friends on such occasions.

“I would know something,” she said, “of the religious opinions of thy daughter, and whether she is willing to join the Society of Friends, to which our family belongs. Although of late Robert Field has not been much with us, and we believe has wandered out to thy church—no doubt influenced by the beauty of the maiden—it is not the custom of our young men to marry out of the ‘Society,’ but there have been cases in which a chosen stranger has consented to attend our

meetings and become one of us. Can this be expected of thy daughter?"

"I cannot hold out any such expectation," said the Vicar quickly. "My daughter has been brought up in strict accordance with the principles of the Church of which I am a humble minister, and I have reason to know that Mr. Robert Field intends to conform to its teaching and communion, although I have in no way attempted to influence him, and believe he had formed the resolution before I had the pleasure of knowing him. I have come here," he said, slightly raising his voice, and turning from the lady to Joshua Field, "to learn whether the young man's father approves of this suit or not, and on his answer its future progress or present cessation must depend."

Joshua Field, thus addressed, was about to reply, although evidently in a difficulty, and not very clear as to the answer he should give on such short notice. Unfortunately, his brother conceived that it was fitting at this moment that he should take up the conversation, and now struck in with his sharp incisive voice.

"No doubt," he said, addressing Mr. Fletcher with great bitterness of tone, "thou art aware this youth is of age, and has already cast aside the authority of his father, and despised the advice of relatives and friends in this matter; therefore, it seems to me a mockery to appear to seek our consent to an alliance with a stranger differing essentially from us in religious views, whose friends must have readily foreseen that it could in no way be desirable."

It had been previously decided in the family council to give some such answer as this to the Vicar on his arrival, and to intimate to him that the proposal could not be received favourably, thereby throwing the onus of its being further entertained by the young lady altogether on her father. But the manly, straightforward address of the Vicar had already disarmed the elder brother, and the sharp speech of Jediah now struck him as much too severe, and not altogether in accordance with the facts.

Jediah had observed the effect of the Vicar's manner and address on his milder-tempered brother, and therefore he had suddenly interposed with the view to prevent all temporising with the question.

Joshua cast a deprecating glance at the splenetic little man beside him, and essayed to speak with the view to modifying the caustic language used by the latter; but ere he could do so, the Vicar had risen to his feet. He was a tall, stately-looking man, and he glanced down on Jediah with an evident feeling of intellectual and physical superiority, but there was no outward sign either of anger or emotion save in his dilated nostril.

"Sir," he said, in his slowest and most measured manner, speaking with silvery clearness of voice, "I addressed myself to the young man's father and his natural guardian, whether he is over or under age, and especially as one who has a right to be consulted and deferred to in so grave a matter. I have said that I meant to abide by his decision, therefore there can be no mockery on my part. For the rest, I have but

learned within the last few days the honour proposed to be done my family; had I suspected it before, perhaps no such proposal would have been made. But I did not apply to the young man's uncle to inform me whether it was desirable or otherwise." Then turning his back on Jediah, he said, "Mr. Field, I await your answer to my question."

Joshua Field was now compelled to speak. His voice trembled as he did so, somewhat after the manner of his sister Rebecca, as if he had recently caught the "quaking" inflection from her.

"I confess," he said, "the idea has not been pleasing to me. I had other views for my son amongst our own people, and I cannot hastily abandon them; but before I can decide anything, I would speak with him, and shall then communicate with thee. I believe, also," he continued after a pause, "thou art utterly blameless in this matter."

Perhaps it would have been better had Mr. Field omitted this last observation. It did not add to the poor Vicar's comfort to be absolved from unjust imputations, so long as blame was still attributed to any one else concerned, and the idea that either of his dear girls at home should be involved by inference was very galling to him; therefore, there was a slight flush on his cheek, as he replied, still addressing Joshua Field:

"It is quite proper that you should have full time and opportunity to consider this question, but you must excuse me for saying that I decline to admit that

there is blame to be attributed to any one; there may be some suffering to be endured by one deeply concerned, and in no way in fault, should your decision be adverse to this suit of your son's. It is the common lot to suffer—but no one connected with me shall be heard to complain, neither shall I notice further the unfair insinuations I have been compelled to listen to."

The Vicar's eye rested sternly on Jediah as he concluded, and then he bowed stiffly to the hard men and perhaps harder woman before him, and took his departure, carrying his head proudly until beyond the gates, and on the pathway by the stream; then his pace slackened, and there came a few tears in his eyes as he paused to think it all over, and to consider the answer to be given by-and-by to the sweet girl who had looked so wistfully in his face and smoothed his white hairs as he set out that summer morning from his peaceful home at Lawley. Truly, it had been better if that pestilent Jediah had a millstone or some other encumbrance about his stiff neck, if only to detain him from that stern family council, ere he had caused one of his little ones to suffer; and then the Vicar brushed away his tears, and sadly remembered his own saying in the great house, "*It is the common lot to suffer.*" He decided that Robert Field should see his daughter no more at present, unless with the approval of his father.



CHAPTER XIV.

RACHEL FLETCHER.

“Maiden with the meek blue eyes,
In whose orb a shadow lies,
Like the dusk in evening skies!
* * * * *
Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet!”

LONGFELLOW.

WHILST the poor Vicar trudged homewards by the
Lauter, like Goldsmith's traveller by another
stream,

“Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,”

there lay on the bank of a little Welsh river, not a hundred miles away, a young man who had gone out that morning from the small inn to which he had betaken himself, ostensibly to fish, furnished by the stout innkeeper with all needful appliances for the sport, but whose neglected rod was suspended idly over the water, as he lay rapt in a brown study.

“His eyes were with his heart, and that was far away,”

dreaming of a fair face, and hearing in the soft ripple of the stream the low, sweet accents of a voice whose

melody was dearer than aught else to the listener. To-morrow, perhaps to-day, he hoped to receive a favourable answer to the hastily-worded letter he had left on his father's desk some days since, begging for some favouring countenance to that suit of his at Lawley, or, if otherwise, intimating his fixed intention to gird up his loins and go forth from his father's house to win for himself a name and enough of this world's goods to warrant his claiming his bride from her fond father, whether his own parent approved or not.

It would have been better for every one had his letter stopped at the appeal, and omitted the threat and the resolution; or, if he had been wise enough to take the old ironmaster with him some fine evening up to Lawley, and leave the young lady's blue eyes and soft voice and beauty to do all the rest. But this was, unfortunately, not the course he adopted, or else this story might never have been written as it must be written now.

There came no answer on that day or the next, and Robert Field chafed impatiently at the delay; he had caught nothing in the way of fish, and, indeed, had not toiled very much to do so. On the third day the landlord did not even go through the pretence of providing his restless guest with rod and line, and the red-armed, barefooted handmaid who waited on him had reported that the strange young man had left his breakfast untasted. It had been noticed by the landlord that he had scarcely eaten anything the day before; but now that good food was absolutely brought

out of the little stuffy parlour untouched, Mrs. Lewis-ap-Williams, who could speak English enough to make herself understood on ordinary matters concerning eating and drinking, and the price thereof, announced her determination to “speer” after the youth, and discover what was on his mind.

Her husband, with the natural bent of a Welshman, had suggested that he must have been making free with the till in his master’s counting-house, and was anxiously dreading arrest; but such a vile suspicion was scouted by his more sagacious better half, who, having closely catechised the untidy waitress in her unmusical native language—for the girl spoke no word of any other—had ascertained that the gentleman, upon whose movements she had kept watch in secret, had once or twice taken a little tress of golden hair from his pocket-book, and had spent a good half-hour looking at it, when he should have been occupied with the Welsh mutton and trout provided for him, and had scarcely tasted the special luxury of tea, purchased in a grocer’s shop sixty miles away, hard by Shrewsbury clock, and brought by Mr. Ap-Williams himself from thence in untanned leather saddle-bags on the back of his stout Welsh pony, carrying Mrs. Ap-Williams in addition on the pillion behind him, and, so laden, making the journey each way in two days, which pilgrimage they were accustomed to perform once a year.

On these occasions Mr. Williams always had his hair cut, and received a clean shave—an extravagance he

never repeated until his next visit; consequently he looked like a very ancient Briton indeed during at least nine months of the year. Mrs. Ap-Williams was also furnished with a considerable amount of hair on her sharp chin, in general dyed a ruddy brown, from over-indulgence in snuff.

The landlady found it impossible to make her unhappy young lodger understand her kind interest in his mental condition. She placed her yellow shrivelled claw on her own skinny bosom, and made hideous grimaces and contortions of body, intending thereby to indicate her sympathy with the internal organ supposed by her to be the seat of his present malady; she then named the various edibles he had sent out untasted, which was about all her stock of English enabled her to do, and pointed frequently down the square orifice in her face, into which she was accustomed to dispatch her own victuals, strongly odoriferous of the leek. Of the meaning of this latter pantomime he had a faint glimmering, assuming it to be a remonstrance against his abstinence; but when she proceeded to poke him in the ribs with her long bony finger, winking and clucking all the time like an old hen, Robert Field concluded she was mad, and fled out of the house. As he did so he ran against the one-eyed village postman, who was also lame and bestrode a miserable donkey, upon whose back he went his daily rounds.

The man handed him a letter, which he recognised as addressed in his father's handwriting, and which

had been already two days in the possession of this mounted official. Robert Field tore it open in haste, expecting much sage counsel and argument covering many pages, such as he would have written himself on the subject so dear to him, concluding, he fondly hoped, either with a reluctant consent, or, at the worst, some plea for delay on account of his youth; but instead, there ran in his father's bold handwriting the few words, "Robert Field is desired to return home at once."

Thus adjured, he immediately dashed the letter on the ground, but was roused to a sense of propriety by a demand for one-and-elevenpence postage, which was the rate in this remote part of the Principality in those days.

Flinging the man a half-crown, he picked up the letter and rushed back to the house to pack up his knapsack and pay his moderate bill, and in less than an hour he was on his way back to the Dale without any very clear idea of what he intended to do, except that he would first see the Vicar, and learn from him the result of the interview with his father. On the manner in which it had gone his future course would depend.

He made his way as rapidly as he could back to Lawley, partly by coach and partly on foot across the hills, and about a week after the meeting between the family and the Vicar he presented himself before the latter to learn his fate.

Mr. Fletcher had made the best of it to his daughters,

only they were given to understand that for a time the visits of the young suitor must be discontinued. Rachel had turned very white at this announcement, although made as gently as her father knew how to make it, and had stolen away quietly to her own room soon after, where she was joined in a little time by her elder sister, to whom the Vicar, in the absence of his younger daughter, had related the details of his interview with the Fields.

Martha Fletcher took some comfort from the concluding words of Mr. Joshua Field, and did not doubt but that it would all come right in the end; and so she administered all the consolation in her power to the trembling, sobbing sister who nestled in her bosom. The resolution of her father, that her lover's visits should be discontinued altogether for the present, seemed to Rachel a very hard thing to bear, and raised a suspicion in her mind that something very serious had occurred between the parents. She had watched for her father's return on the day of his visit to the Dale, and knew by his very gait and drooping head, the instant he came in sight on the river bank, that all had not gone well between him and the proud family into whose midst Robert Field proposed to bring her as his bride.

Rachel Fletcher, like all maidens who love only once and for ever, had no fear as to the constancy of her lover; but, like her father, her spirit rebelled against the idea that she should be received either with coldness or reserve by the wealthy family of the Dale,

whose position had hitherto appeared to her so much above her own. She also feared much that in case Mr. Field did not approve of his son's proposal, an insuperable obstacle to their happiness would exist. But this was a view of the matter in which her elder sister did not concur. Had it been her own case, it is probable Miss Fletcher might have held the same opinion; but she deemed her sister Rachel as one "far above rubies," and fit to be the wife of any man, no matter whom, who would be fortunate enough to win her heart. Therefore she decided she would speak with Robert Field before he was utterly banished from the house; and it so happened that when the young man arrived on foot in the afternoon, she was the first to see him, the Vicar being then from home, engaged in his parish work.

Robert Field was travel-stained and tired; but, with his knapsack braced on his shoulders, and his erect carriage and handsome countenance, somewhat bronzed by his recent exposure to the keen air and hot sun on the Welsh hills, Martha thought he looked more of the man to whom her sister might be trusted than he had ever looked before. She hastened to meet him before any communication could pass between him and her father, who was expected home in a short time.

"Mr. Field," she said, "I am sorry I have not good news for you; but you must not despair. Be patient and wait, for her sake."

"Tell me what has occurred," said Robert Field,

seating himself in a little summer-house to which she had led him.

She told him, as closely as she could recollect, the substance of the interview between his relatives and the Vicar.

“And, now,” she said, laying her hand kindly on his arm, “you must be gentle with your father. Remember who and what he is, and how very wise and good, and make allowances for the prejudices of your uncle and aunt. No doubt they all have your welfare at heart, and are acting for the best; but if the good Lord thinks it is right, it will all come to pass as you wish; only do not be hasty. You know that Rachel loves you, but she will obey her father in all things, and he deems it best, under present circumstances, that you should not see her for a short time, until your father has more fully considered the matter.”

“Not see her!” said Robert Field, starting to his feet. “Martha, am I a boy to be driven about in leading strings? This must not, cannot be. I cannot exist if I am forbidden to see her. Surely you will not lend yourself to so cruel a proceeding.” Martha heard her father’s footstep on the gravel path outside, and rose to meet him. The Vicar immediately took up the conversation where it was, having overheard the last words as he approached.

“It is best for the present,” he said, kindly; “indeed it is best, and will lead to a better understanding with your father, and I am sure you will come to think so later on. You must obey him in

this matter for a time, even though you are yourself come to man's estate; and remember also that Rachel is still very young. For a while this suit must rest; but I do not say for ever; nor do I believe it will be for long if you are wise and patient. Meantime you may be happily employed in completing your education, by following out your father's idea of travelling abroad."

The young man remained silent, but his brow was contracted sternly as if with pain.

"It is Uncle Jediah's doing," he said; "he cannot forgive the 'Refutation.' But my father must hear me alone when I see him, and I hope to alter his decision if it be, as you think, adverse to my hopes. Of one thing rest assured, Mr. Fletcher; I shall never cease to love your daughter, or to strive to win her despite of every obstacle, and I hope you will not adhere to your resolution that I shall not see her—at least not for long. It would be cruel to us both. May I not see her," he pleaded, "once more before I go to the Dale?"

Mr. Fletcher shook his head, and did not invite the young man into the house, but some refreshment was sent out to him where they were, of which he scarcely partook.

He was not permitted to speak to Rachel ere he departed; but as he passed out, and glanced up at a well-known window, a small white hand drew aside the curtain for a little bit, and was kissed to him by the timid girl hiding within, fearful that she was dis-

obeying her father in so doing, but anxious to convey some little hope to her dejected lover.

When Robert Field reached the Dale House later in the day, he was informed that his father was abroad as usual at his business, but that his Aunt Rebecca desired to see him. That worthy woman treated him to a homily of great length, to which he was compelled to listen in silence, as any argument with the venerable lady, who believed she spoke from inspiration on such occasions, was out of the question. He then retired to change his dress. At the usual hour his father returned home, but did not take any special notice of him on their meeting at the dinner-table. The meal was eaten in silence and in solemn state, as usual, a number of serving men in sober drab being in attendance, with very little to do. The upper female servants dined at the same table, but with a wide interval between them and the family. The men servants had all dined previously, and now waited on the rest. At most times it was a cheerless meal, only relieved occasionally by a little discussion between the young man and his uncle, to which the head of the family would listen with pleasure, although he seldom joined in the conversation. Fortunately for every one, "the spirit" never moved Aunt Rebecca at meal-times, and therefore she invariably remained silent throughout, eating very little, but carefully noting that every one was attended to, and that the dishes were properly prepared; if not, the cook had an exhortation later on.

On this day there was evidently a weight on the

spirits of every one, which deeply irritated the young man, who felt that he was the unoffending cause of all this gloom, and wished himself elsewhere.

He could not but contrast this melancholy feast with the cheerful meals at Lawley, where the Vicar's shrewd remarks, and his daughters' wit, were mingled with pleasant laughter, as the richest sauce to the viands on the table.

The servants who waited at Lawley were two pretty young women, sisters, who had been brought up in the vicarage, and were accustomed to glide noiselessly behind the chairs, and found time to listen now and then, with evident delight, to the lively sallies of the young ladies.

To unlucky guests who were not "Friends," a dinner at the great house was sure to be followed by an attack of indigestion, and was seldom indulged in twice if it could be avoided. When the lengthy concluding "meditation" was over, Robert Field fled to his own room, and occupied himself in packing trunks with his books and clothes.

He had been somewhat undecided as to his future course when he sat down to dinner, but the dreary ceremony of feeding like a machine, at which he had assisted, was too much for him, and he felt a suffocating sense of utter misery under his father's roof, and a desire to be gone before another day dawned on him—he knew not and cared not whither, so that it was to some place which as yet had not been blessed with the presence of any members of the society to which his

family belonged. My readers must remember I am writing of a bygone generation, and perhaps of extreme examples of a sect whose manners and customs have altered very much for the better.

Whilst the young man was busily engaged in his own room, there came a light tap at his door, and on opening it he beheld the tall spare form of Josiah Morris, whom he had left in the dining-hall. Robert Field was at all times glad to see Josiah. They had spent many pleasant hours together, and much of what he knew of certain subjects was due to the teaching of the respected cashier.

“Robert,” said the latter gravely, “I wish to speak to thee; may I come in?”

“Of course,” answered his young friend; “I am glad to see thee always.”

Robert Field still used the form of speech of the Friends at home, although much converse with the Fletchers had somewhat broken him of the habit with strangers.

“I am pained to see this,” said Josiah, pointing to the signs of preparation for departure on the floor. “Hast thou thought well of thy duty to thy father, and of his wishes? This step will grieve him much, and will not lead to happiness for thyself. Truly, I speak from some sad experience. I once disobeyed my parents in a matter like thine, and had much reason to repent of it.”

He then gently told the young man something of the private history of his own life; how when a very

young man he had travelled as agent for his father, who was a manufacturer in the Midland Counties, and had met at the house of one of their customers a young orphan lady, who was governess in the family, but not a member of the Friends' Society, who, he said, "had bewitched him by her beauty and clever ways;" and although he had striven against the spell as against a temptation of the Evil One, it had been too much for him, and he had hastily married the young lady, who was of a gay and lively disposition, and highly accomplished,—against the expressed wish and command of his father. But remores and contrition had set in soon afterwards, and he had been severe and harsh with her in regard to some supposed levity of manner or conduct, until one day she had fled away from his house, and left him. Whether she was dead, or utterly lost to him, he did not say; but the telling of his story, so far as he deemed fit to reveal it, evidently cost him much pain, and was accompanied with visible emotion.

Robert Field understood now much that had puzzled him previously in the manner and character of the cashier, and his eyes filled with tears in sympathy with his friend's evident suffering; at the same time, it appeared to him that there was no resemblance between the sweet girl he admired at Lawley, and the thoughtless young woman who had so hastily abandoned her husband.

The interview was brought to an abrupt close by a message from Mr. Field, to the effect that he wished to see his son immediately, and the young man hastily

left the room, leaving his good counsellor behind, who suddenly dropped off into a deep reverie, which was a habit of his whenever the painful subject of his married life was accidentally recalled. Perhaps on these occasions his mind returned to the question of "what might have been," had he not suddenly drawn the rein so tight, and dealt so sternly with the young creature whom he had promised to love and cherish, whose sensitive spirit had been stung to sudden madness by the harsh and unjust language addressed to her by one whom she had previously believed to be all gentleness and mercy.

Robert Field bowed low and reverently as he entered his father's room, but instantly raised his head erect as he caught sight of his uncle, almost buried in a deep arm-chair at his father's elbow.

It was unfortunate that the conference was to be held before a witness, and that witness so prejudiced.

He had been prepared to make material concessions when he left his own room, under the influence of the advice he had just received; but something in the very presence of his sharp uncle, seated with one thin leg dangling like a whip across the other, whilst his restless grey eyes peered out under his wiry eyebrows, disconcerted and irritated the young man at the outset.

"Robert," said his father, after some moments' silence, "thy course of late is causing me much pain and anxiety. For some inscrutable reason thou hast constantly absented thyself from our Meeting, and despised the faithful counsel of the elders. Thou hast

hastily sought an objectionable alliance with those who are not of us, nor ever can be, and whose station in life, although respectable, is not such as would render the idea one which might be hopefully entertained in the future. Thou art the first of this family to think of marriage at so early a period of life, and also the first to seek a wife from the stranger at our gates. Added to this, the letter thou hast addressed to me conveys vague threats which should not be addressed to one who has been so over-indulgent a parent as thine. Young man," he added with severity after a pause, "I await thy explanation, and thine uncle will judge between us this day."

The head and front of his offending was thus placed before Robert Field. The indictment was clear and intelligible, and it behoved him to be wary in his defence under the eye of the keen judge to whom his father had appealed. He now felt how embarrassing was the presence of a third person, especially in the capacity of umpire, and he endeavoured to arrange his thoughts in order to make one last effort to break down the barrier slowly forming like ice between him and his father. He thought also of the prize to be won and of the cost of defeat, and slowly recalled, one by one, the accusatory sentences enunciated so solemnly by his father, who evidently had spoken by the card.

"Father," he said with grave emphasis, "I am grieved to have caused thee pain or anxiety. I did not knowingly or willingly do so. As to my absence from the Meeting of late, I have seriously considered the

matter, and I have carefully studied the tenets of our sect, and have experience of their form of worship. I was prejudiced as thou art, and as uncle Jediah is, in its favour. I have learnt better things, and can no longer conform to the teaching or customs of the Friends. In this matter I can admit no blame, nor can I promise any alteration. I intend to join the communion of the English Church, and to worship in its Liturgy. I believe I shall be a better and happier man by so doing. I have not decided on this course hastily, but it is adopted of my own free will, and from personal conviction. As to my hope and desire to marry Rachel Fletcher, I cannot abandon my intention; it may be somewhat premature, as thou sayest. We are both very young, but we can wait. I cannot and will not give the maiden up if she will be mine, and she is worthy to be the wife of a far better man than I am. I did not know that I had threatened aught, but I am unhappy in this house. I wish to be of some use in the world. I can be of little service in the business, for which I have no taste; but whatever I may do, I hope will be done with thy approval and assistance."

"That is, thou wilt go thy own way, Robert," said Jediah, speaking harshly and suddenly, "and lean on thy father's arm when it pleaseth thee. Truly, thou hast profited by the teaching of thy new friends at Lawley, and hast forgotten in their company everything in which thou wast carefully instructed before. If thou wert my son, thou shouldst go thy way and partake to thy fill of the husks which he swine do eat,

until thou didst return like the prodigal ; but of approval and assistance in thy disobedient froward course, I shall advise thy father to give thee none."

Here Jediah sprang out of his comfortable seat and confronted his nephew, whose heightened colour bore witness to the keenness of the rebuff he had received.

"I trust, Uncle Jediah," he said sternly, "my father will do what he deems right, no matter what thy opinion or advice may be. But neither for thee nor for him can I change the views I have expressed, and indeed I should despise myself were I to do so."

Joshua Field's eyes flashed as this last sentence fell on his ear, and then he rose also and stood beside his brother, whose influence over him in those days was unfortunately very great.

"Young man," he said, "thou mayest go thy way ; henceforth I shall not look on thee as my son. I cannot approve of thy course or conduct, least of all in this imprudent marriage ; but thou hast come to man's estate, and art thine own master. I shall not leave thee without means until, as thou sayest, thou canst earn thine own bread ; but unless I send for thee, see me no more."

He waved his hand to the door, and his son bowed low and left the room in silence and in anger. When he reached his own chamber he found his friend Josiah still waiting for him.

A glance at the young man's face told the cashier what had been the result of the interview, which was no more than he had anticipated. He sighed heavily as

he turned to assist the youth in packing away his wardrobe and books, and then went away to his own room.

He returned shortly after with a purse of gold and a cheque-book signed on every page; these he pressed on Robert Field, saying, "Thou knowest I am rich and have little need of money, and thou must take all thou requirest from me at present."

The young man reluctantly accepted the proffered kindness; indeed he could not do otherwise, having but little money in his possession; then he laid him down to sleep for the last time in his father's house. His faithful friend kept watch beside his bed, hoping against hope that something would occur ere morning to soften the father's heart, and prevent this "the first break in the family," as to the result of which he was filled with dismal forebodings.



CHAPTER XV.

THE STUDENT.

"But as he lay in the morning light, his face for a moment
Seemed to assume once more the forms of its earlier manhood :
So are wont to be changed the faces of those who are dying.
Hot and red on his lips still burned the flush of the fever;
* * * * *
Motionless, senseless, dying he lay, and his spirit exhausted
Seemed to be sinking down through infinite depths in the darkness."
LONGFELLOW.

MRS. MALTBY was not altogether a woman of one idea ; but to the particular idea which was uppermost in her mind at any time she adhered persistently as long as there was any chance of carrying her point. The purpose with which she had set out on her journey to Oxford was to rescue her son from the meshes of the Established Church, and to turn him back, if possible, like a stray sheep, into the safe fold of the Wesleyan ministry. She knew enough of the character of the young man whom she had brought into the world and reared to manhood to understand that any sudden attempt to turn him out of one path might have the effect of driving him down another equally dangerous. Like a prudent general, she,

therefore, determined to lay siege to the youth by cautious approaches, mindful of the precept of Solomon, that "surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." Accordingly, when she alighted from the "Flying Wonder," as the fast coach of those days was called, before Mr. Brunel had driven it ignominiously off the road by the extension of the Great Western Railway to the north, she betook herself to a decent lodging in the neighbourhood of Magdalene College, recommended by Mr. Slowman, who stated that "the landlady was a devout woman, who, like the poor Shunamite of old, always reserved a little chamber for such of the Wesleyan ministers as were in want of rest on their journeyings."

Between these two good women there was a common bond of union. They were both well instructed in all knowledge and all mysteries of their sect—full of Christian experience, deep in the subtleties of free grace, justification, and perfection, as taught by Mr. Wesley, whose writings they looked upon as second only to those of St. Paul.

Mrs. Maltby had rejoiced at the prospect of spiritual communion with such a woman, but she was not prepared for the pleasant surprise which awaited her when she discovered that her landlady was the mother of Silas Clayton—a fact which that sly Mr. Slowman had studiously concealed, knowing what a joy the discovery would be on her arrival in the City of the Plain. Indeed, it did much to raise her spirits and redeem the character of the place at the outset. Surely, she

thought, Oxford might not be so very bad, if such a saint as Dora Clayton had lived there so long unharmed ; but then she remembered, with a sigh, that there had been found a few righteous persons in that other city for which the father of the faithful had pleaded long ago. Peradventure, if the fervent prayer of a righteous man availed so much, the earnest prayers of *two* righteous women would effect something towards turning back that wandering sheep into the fold ; although it never occurred to either of them that the particular enclosure in question might not be exactly that in which Providence intended he should find rest unto his soul, because *rest* in any other was equivalent in their minds to the loss of the sheep altogether.

Mrs. Clayton was already intimately acquainted with the object of her friend's journey. Silas wrote once or twice a week to his mother at great length, and it may be inferred that everything concerning the Maltby family had a large place in the correspondence. Besides this, as an old inhabitant of the learned city, she was *au fait* with everything of interest in the colleges near her, and had a little gossiping acquaintance with some of the head porters. Thus she knew by repute who were the "reading men," or the men who took to boating or hunting—who were likely to be "plucked" or to "come out well in honours;" and amongst these last she had heard favourably mentioned the name of Edward Maltby.

Mrs. Maltby felt no small pride when this was told her by her landlady, although she did not understand very clearly the precise meaning of the phrases used ;

and when she paid a visit next morning, under her friend's guidance, to the venerable pile of buildings in which her son resided as a graduate, she expected that she would find the young man clad in full academic costume, seated at the feet of some learned Gamaliel, in a lofty chamber walled in with books. Judge, then, of the astonishment of the good lady, when they had passed the rigid scrutiny of the lodge-keeper, and had taken a preliminary canter round the great quadrangle, in which Mrs. Clayton pointed out the grotesque masks and gargoyles which are its special adornment, but whose painful appearance rather horrified her simple friend, they came at length to a low doorway and mounted several flights of a well-worn staircase to the rooms of Mr. Maltby, who on the present occasion had "sporting his oak."

Fortunately, a student, who discovered the two ladies nonplussed in front of the stout door, which had no visible means of communication with the inner inhabitant, took pity on them, and contrived, by blowing a peculiarly shrill whistle in the keyhole, to rouse the studious tenant to the knowledge of the fact that some special circumstance required his personal appearance. A shooting back of bolts and creaking of iron hinges ensued, and Mrs. Maltby and her son stood, as she had determined at Lauterdale they should stand, "face to face," supported in the background by the bodily presence of the mother of the man for whom he entertained a particular aversion.

The student's personal appearance was not at this

moment exactly what it should have been for presentation in female society. He was reading hard for his next examination, and had burned the midnight oil in close study during many nights previous. His head was enveloped in a turban of wet towels; his shirt collar was open and crumpled; his person clad in an old dressing gown, which his mother knew at sight had never come out of his original wardrobe at Lauterdale; and his feet reposed in loose Turkish slippers, which were things Mrs. Maltby especially disliked, as savouring of idleness and effeminacy.

“Mother!” he exclaimed, “what in the name of wonder brings you here? Has anything occurred at home?”

“I have been anxious to see you, Edward,” she replied nervously, “ever since I received your letter. This is Mrs. Clayton, at whose house I am lodging at present; may we come in?”

Edward Maltby winced visibly at the announcement and request; but there was no help for it, and therefore he admitted them to his sanctum—retiring at once himself to an inner den, which was his bedroom, there to assume a more presentable costume.

Meanwhile Mrs. Maltby curiously scanned the apartment; her magnificent visions of student luxury and refinement were dissolved in an instant. The room was bare and comfortless in her eyes, possessing as furniture only a rickety little table and three hard Windsor chairs, a few shelves heavily laden with books, and a cupboard. She wondered what the young man

could find in the place to entice him away from his cheerful home in the Dale, and she longed with all her maternal instincts to follow him into that inner apartment, to discover what kind of bed he slept in; for truly she thought, with pain, if it were as hard as the chair upon which she sat, his lot was to be pitied. By the time she had taken in every feature of the room, even to the pattern of the faded paper on the walls, and of the still more faded carpet on the floor, frayed into holes beneath the table by her son's restless feet, he had completed his hasty toilet, and now suddenly appeared, respectably clothed, and in his right mind.

"Now, mother, what is it?" he exclaimed as he re-entered the room. He did not notice Mrs. Clayton at all, and that worthy woman took to staring out of the window into the quadrangle.

Mrs. Maltby endeavoured to explain to her son that the subject of his letter, announcing his intention to enter the ministry of the English Church, was of such serious moment that she could rest neither day or night with it on her mind, and therefore had set out to see him. He now regretted very much that he had felt it his duty to inform her of his intentions at so early a period, the fact being that he had actually done so under the advice of the Vicar of Lawley, who conceived that the less concealment there was in such matters, the better in the end for all parties. However, as she had come, he decided to make the best of it, and then he skilfully evaded all discussion by proposing that he should show them over the college and the city.

His mother did not care to see either one or the other, but she thought that the fresh air and temporary relaxation from study would do him good. She had observed those wet towels round his head when first he appeared in the doorway, and immediately suspected headache, and noted also that his hands felt dry and hot; therefore she readily assented to his proposal, postponing for the present her private determination to see the inside of that other room, with especial reference to the thickness of the blankets on the bed whereon her misguided son reposed; "that is," she said to herself, "if he ever takes any sleep at all," which she greatly doubted as she looked anxiously on his pale face and sunken eyes. In a few minutes he was escorting the two simple women over the college, and explaining its many architectural beauties. To them it appeared that great waste of money and very little real usefulness had been the result of the labour and outlay, and the fact that the place had once been the residence of monks, who had designed and executed the grotesque stone carving, in no way increased their æsthetic appreciation of the work. Mrs. Maltby was far better pleased when her son, finding the college uninteresting, carried her off on his arm to see the shops in the High Street, leaving Mrs. Clayton to return to the care of her own domicile.

Mrs. Maltby enjoyed her little trot in the old city very much indeed, hanging on her tall son's arm, especially as he allowed her to look in at the drapers' windows as long as she pleased. He also brought her

down to the meadows of Christ Church, where she admired the light boats on the river, only objecting a little to the airiness of the costume worn by the crews, and the danger they ran of being capsized in such "cockleshells."

They dined together at the George, and she enjoyed the dinner vastly, and insisted on paying for it, and also on ordering a bottle of good port to put some colour in his white cheeks, and then she told him all the gossip of the Dale—about the great lawsuit between the company and Jacob Grimshaw, the old miller; and how young Mr. Field went every Sunday, wet or dry, up to Lawley to hear Parson Fletcher, and often dined at the vicarage afterwards; how edifying was the sermon preached last Sunday by Mr. Slowman in the Dale chapel, and how Silas Clayton was trying to improve the singing. But at this her son changed the subject, and inquired first after his father's health and business, and then about his sister Patty and her pursuits.

"Mother," he said, "I'm afraid Patty will be very dull during your absence; she really has no suitable companions of her own age, and I wish you would allow her to go now and then to Lawley."

"It's a very long way," said Mrs. Maltby, "and the days are so very hot for walking, and your father wants the gig so often; I am sure I don't see how it can be managed."

Edward Maltby knew very well the gig could be had readily enough when the occasion was to visit Mrs. Slowman, and that Patty would be allowed to walk the

distance as often as she pleased, provided she avoided the vicarage. He returned to the charge, nevertheless.

"But, mother," he said, "Patty should know more of the people in the neighbourhood than she does, especially nice well-bred people like the Chestertons, who have frequently asked her to visit them."

Now, the Chestertons lived very close to the Fletchers, and the girls of the family were intimate with those of the vicarage, and had a pew in the church, in which room had always been made for Edward Maltby whenever he came to Lawley on Sundays. They also occasionally attended the services at the chapel. Mrs. Chesterton having come of a Wesleyan stock, had occasional predilections for what she termed "a good rousing" under Mr. Slowman, on "Special Collection Sundays," when he was most eloquent.

"I don't know much about the Chestertons," said Mrs. Maltby dubiously, "I like people to be either one thing or the other. Patty has a good deal to do in the house, and your father requires her attention in my absence. Besides, she is improving in her music very much, and Mr. Clayton says 'she should practice regularly for two or three hours a day.'"

"I don't know what Mr. Clayton has to do with it," said Edward Maltby, with a dark look on his brow, which the poor woman understood well enough. "I wish Patty would keep him at a greater distance," he added with some heat. "I hope you don't want her to marry a Methodist missionary, and live like a wandering Arab, or be eaten by savages. How did you come to

fall in with his mother?" he inquired in a severe tone; "I wish you had written to me to find you lodgings. And, by the way, mother, what is it has brought you here? Surely my letter was clear enough."

"Indeed it was," said Mrs. Maltby hurriedly, producing her pocket-handkerchief, and sobbing audibly. "Your letter has torn my heart, Edward. Is it for this that I unfortunately consented to your coming to this evil place? that you should be a castaway. I have prayed night and day," she continued, "that I might be spared this cross; but now I shall lift up my head no longer in the congregation. Oh! if you had only listened to Mr. Slowman, or been guided by Silas Clayton, Edward." Here her sobs and tears compelled the poor lady to cease speaking.

"Mother," he said kindly, "this is really all prejudice and nonsense. If Mr. Wesley lived in these days, he would never have left the Church, and it is time some of us should set a good example, and return. I hope you will one day rejoice with me in my chosen life, and learn to call nothing that is good by hard names." Then he tenderly assisted her,—still sobbing spasmodically,—to put on her shawl and bonnet, and led her slowly back to her lodgings; but this time she did not want to see any shops, and he knew that she was silently weeping.

Before they reached the cottage of Mrs. Clayton it began to rain. Mrs. Maltby pressed her son urgently to come in and have some tea, and no doubt, if she had

been residing under any other roof, he would have gladly done so ; but his aversion to the Claytons stood in the way, and therefore he pleaded the necessity of returning to his studies as a reason for declining, but promised to call at an early hour on the morrow. He then set out alone, in the rain, for the college. He was thinly clad, having hastily arrayed himself in a light walking coat to accompany his mother, and ere he reached the gate he was wet through. He had been chafing inwardly during the last hour at what he deemed his mother's foolishness in visiting Oxford, which he attributed in some degree to Silas Clayton. He had been much annoyed at any allusion to the latter in connection with his sister's name, and still more vexed at finding his mother residing under the roof of Mrs. Clayton. Added to all this, there was the fear of serious interference with his studies by reason of her presence.

He was reading hard for his examination, which was close at hand ; he hoped to take high honours, and wished to have the next few days altogether to himself before he went up. Thus, by the time he reached his rooms in the college, he had worked himself into a perfect fever of vexation.

Flinging himself, wet as he was, into a chair, he plunged at once into his studies at the point where he had been interrupted in the morning, determined to make up as well as he could for lost time, and anxious to change his unpleasant course of thought.

In a short time, such was his mental training and power over his own will, he became absorbed in the books and papers around him, pursuing some abstruse problem for hours until he had mastered it. He started from his seat after midnight to find the fire had gone out, and that his limbs were cramped with cold, whilst his temples throbbed with heat and pain. He now remembered having sat down in his wet clothes, and hurried in some alarm to his bed, but the mischief was done beyond recall. He lay tossing all night in fever—now burning with heat and thirst, the next instant shivering with cold. He longed for the dawn, that he might obtain some medical assistance ; he swallowed all the water he could find in the apartment, and yet his throat felt like a furnace.

Later on, he could no longer rise from his hard couch : the pillow seemed to heave beneath his head, the room appeared to be dancing round him, strange forms and faces came and went amid the darkness—now grotesquely like Mr. Slowman, now like Silas Clayton, again like his mother and her friend. He flung his arms wildly up at them, and called them by name. He covered his head with the bedclothes, but they peeped in at the corners, and laughed and gibbered at him until he could endure it no longer, and tossed the covering away from him. Then they all appeared to come and sit on the bed until there was no more room, but still they changed and changed, and came nearer and nearer. How he longed for daylight to scare them

away ! But when the first rays of the morning sun penetrated that lonely chamber, they fell on a man raving in the paroxysms of brain fever, alone, untended, and likely to do himself some deadly injury if not speedily restrained by force.



CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

“He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

COLERIDGE.

ABOUT seven o'clock came the old female attendant, or “bedmaker,” who waited on Edward Maltby in the college. She heard his hoarse cries in the bedroom, and peered cautiously in round the door. The sight was a painful one indeed—the veins in his neck and forehead seemed like knotted cords, and he was plunging wildly from side to side, now dashing his head against the wall, now hanging out of bed as if about to fall on the floor. She knew to her loss his abstemious habits, and therefore no suspicion that this was the effect of drink crossed the old woman’s mind. She had seen cases of that class amongst the students before now, and also other cases where the overwrought brain had revolted and turned fiercely on itself in revenge, and she strongly suspected that this was one of the latter kind. With singular prudence

she stole on tiptoe into the chamber, and crept to the dressing-table, from the drawer of which she cautiously removed his razors ; but in retreating from the room his eye caught sight of her, and in an instant he was out of bed, with the apparent intention of seizing them. The old servant sprang in terror through the open door, and closed and locked it after her. In endeavouring to reach it he fell heavily on the floor, his head striking the corner of an iron-bound trunk, and there he lay, stunned and bleeding. Meanwhile the old bedmaker fled as fast as her limbs could carry her to the porter's lodge, and reported that " Mr. Maltby was either possessed by the Evil One or in a mad fever," such being the two alternatives which suggested themselves to her mind.

The burly porter referred to his books, and slowly ascertained that the gentleman had returned at an early hour on the previous evening, and then he carried off the excited female, bearing the razors with her as trophies and evidence of the risk she had run, to report the case to the Master.

The Master of Magdalene had not yet risen, but on being informed of the sudden illness of the graduate he dispatched a messenger at once for one of the medical attendants of the college, and then hurriedly dressed, and formally proceeded to take down the evidence of the bedmaker with great minuteness.

How long the unfortunate young man would have lain on the floor without assistance it is impossible to say, as the messenger sent out by the Master found

the medical gentleman absent from his house, and sat down to wait his return. Fortunately, Providence sent a good Samaritan to the aid of the sufferer, or probably one of the personages in this story would have been missing.

The "Flying Wonder," which had safely delivered Mrs. Maltby in Oxford, bore another traveller that morning from the borders of the Black Country to the learned city, on his way to London, in the person of Robert Field, flying from his home in Lauterdale, and uncertain as to his future course, but gravitating southwards, like all restless spirits, to the great city on the Thames. As the coach rolled slowly over the bridge, near Magdalene College, the coachman, by whose side sat Robert Field on the box seat, pointed with pride to the old pile of buildings, and named the college—

"Maudlin, sir," he said ; "that be Maudlin, wan o' the oldest on 'em, and wan o' the best."

His hearer remembered at once that this was the college of his friend Edward Maltby, and finding on inquiry that the coach would remain for an hour at the "George" to allow the passengers to breakfast, he was dropped by his own request at the gateway. He learned the position of his friend's quarters from the assistant-porter, on duty in the absence of his senior, then in attendance on the Master, who was still engaged in taking down his statement and that of the garrulous old bedmaker, whilst the life of the subject interested was ebbing away at the other side of the quadrangle.

On ascending the staircase, and entering the outer

room by the door which the old woman had left open, Robert Field was surprised to find no one visible. There was evidence of a late vigil on the part of his friend, in the candles burnt to their sockets, and the open books and papers covered with algebraic symbols on the table. He approached the bedroom door and knocked softly, presuming the student was still asleep, but there was no response. He was about to turn away, but, accidentally looking downward, saw a small thin stream of blood oozing beneath the door, to which the carpet did not reach. Alarmed at this, he turned the key in the lock and entered. As he did so he beheld the upturned white face of his friend, who lay still as if in death, whilst the blood welled slowly from a wound in the temple, and trickled over the floor to his feet. The eyes were open and staring, the hands clenched, and the feet drawn up to the body. The first suspicion of the horrified visitor was that there had been foul play; the tumbled condition of the bed-clothes, the open drawer in the dressing-table, the door locked on the outside, the position of the body on the floor, and that ugly cut on the young student's forehead, appeared to warrant this conclusion.

Robert Field hastily raised his unfortunate friend in his arms, and replaced him on the hard couch. As he did so a groan escaped from the wounded man, and his eyelids closed; there was some hope in this, and on feeling over his heart there was further evidence of life in its irregular but rapid pulsation. Mr. Field bound his handkerchief round his friend's forehead to staunch the

bleeding, and having disposed him as comfortably as he could on his pillow, he sought for water in the apartments to bathe his face. Finding none, he rushed out of the room for assistance, and thundered at an adjacent door on the staircase, thereby arousing the occupant within, who immediately appeared, and angrily demanded the cause of the assault and battery ; but on learning the state of the case, hastened with his water-jug and some brandy to the rescue. They bathed the wounded man's head and face with water, and attempted to pour some of the spirit down his throat, but this he stoutly resisted, clenching his teeth and hoarsely murmuring "water."

They placed some to his parched lips, and he raised his head from the pillow and drank eagerly, until he had swallowed all that remained in the large jug ; then he lay back wearily, and murmured, "Mother!—send for mother!"

His fellow-student was the youth who had succeeded in obtaining an audience for the two ladies the day before, and he now explained to Robert Field that Mrs. Maltby was in Oxford, and volunteered to go to the gate to obtain assistance.

During his absence Mr. Field made some further investigation into his friend's condition, and came to the conclusion that it was a case of severe illness and accidental injury.

The wound on the young man's forehead was not serious, and the bleeding had been of immediate service in relieving the surcharged vessels of the brain ; but the

fever was evidently increasing; and, as the patient began to rave incoherently, and to roll his head from side to side, Robert Field sat on the bedside and did all in his power to assuage his friend's suffering. It seemed an age before the young student returned. When he did so he was accompanied by the Master of the college, who had finished taking down the statement of the bedmaker, which had been duly attested by the head porter, who now appeared in the background, and was shortly followed by the medical man, who fortunately just then entered the college on his usual round. He was a tall thin man, with a stoop acquired from a habit of peering steadfastly into the faces of his numerous patients, and was also a man of very few words, but prompt in action.

He removed the bandage and allowed the light to fall on the wound, then pressed it all round with a bony finger, and smiled a grim smile, which wrinkled his lean jaws into innumerable creases. He next examined the iron-bound corner of the trunk, and looked carefully at the blood on the floor, opening the door to form an estimate of the quantity outside, and then he betook himself, watch in hand, to a calculation of the patient's pulse; made a note of it, and raised one of the sufferer's eyelids with his thumb, uttered a short preliminary "Ha!" and said,

"He must be removed to the hospital at once."

Robert Field explained that the young man's mother was believed to be in Oxford; upon which the physician said, very tersely, "Send for her at once,"

and proceeded to the outer room to speak to the Master.

“This is a serious case,” he said. “When was he seen last by any one in the college?”

The Master produced the manuscript deposition, and read solemnly therefrom the hour at which the porter stated he had entered Mr. Maltby’s name on his return to the college through the lodge on the previous evening.

“Let me see him,” said the doctor, cutting short the reading of the document.

The porter was duly presented, being called in from the landing, where he was engaged with the student in hearing for the third time the narrative of the bed-maker, which had now reached an appalling and sensational character. He was a very fat man, much troubled with asthma, and the effort of ascending the steep stairs, added to his previous excitement, had knocked all the breath out of him.

“Jones, when did he come in last evening?” said the doctor.

“Ugh—ugh,” gasped Jones, “I—duly—entered the hour—ugh—and—minute in—the gate-book, and—ugh—it’s just been took down by the Master.”

Jones looked like a man who had done his duty, and expected approval.

“Jones says at a quarter past eight,” said the worthy Master, referring again to his memoranda, and rubbing his spectacles. “Do you think, doctor,” he continued, “that there has been violence? If so, we must have a

formal inquiry on oath ; a solemn investigation on oath."

Here he shook the deposition at the bedmaker and the student, who had both incautiously ventured within the door in the wake of the porter, and who immediately retired, stumbling over one another, and on top of some other inquisitive people on the staircase.

"Was he wet?" said the doctor, again addressing the porter, and ignoring the Master's question.

Jones placed his finger on his eyebrow, as if making a sublime effort of memory, and extended his left hand to enforce silence whilst the effort was being made.

"Yes," he said, at length, "decidedly wet—ugh—wet as a fowl—absolutely saturated, sir. I remember his coat was shiny all down the back—ugh—and the brim of his 'at like the eave of an 'ouse."

"A house! Jones," said the Master, emphatically.

"A 'ouse, sir," said Jones, hastily correcting himself, and believing he had made an error in the article.

"I said 'house,' not 'ouse,' Jones," said the Master, in a voice of thunder ; whereat the bedmaker fled downstairs altogether, the student retreated into his room, and Jones gasped in silence.

"Wet as a fowl," said the doctor to himself—"um." Then, looking at the candlesticks and papers on the table, "reading hard—um;" then at the fireplace, "fire out, no doubt—wet clothes—overwork. Brain fever," he said, summing up suddenly, aloud, at which the Master, who was not sure but that it might be infectious, began to move to the door, and pleaded the

necessity of returning to his breakfast, hoping that the doctor would come in and join him, when they could discuss the poor fellow's case at leisure.

The doctor had breakfasted two hours before, and politely declined. He inquired from the porter if he knew the present residence of the young man's mother; and, after a second severe effort at recollection, that fat functionary declared he thought he knew the abode of one of the two ladies who had called on Mr. Maltby yesterday, and would send round to inquire.

The doctor dispatched him, wheezing and puffing, to his lodge on this errand, and also with a prescription for the patient, to be obtained at the chemist's by the messenger, and requested him to send the bedmaker at once to the bedroom, which he re-entered.

Robert Field was supporting his friend's head on his arm, as the latter appeared to be easier in that position than when reclining on the low, hard pillow. Edward Maltby seemed to recognise him, and slowly uttered his name, then the names of Martha and Rachel Fletcher, and very often that of his mother, coupled sometimes with the name of Mrs. Clayton.

They surmised that he was endeavouring to indicate Mrs. Maltby's present address, but could not form the sentence. The doctor laid his bony hand on the patient's wrist, and slid his rigid fingers over his limbs. The sufferer shrunk sensibly from the contact, and groaned as if it hurt him.

"The bleeding has weakened him," said the doctor, "but his pulse is very wild. I fear it will be a long

case and a severe one. Do you know him intimately?" he inquired, after a pause.

"Only a little of late," replied Robert Field; "I called here accidentally on my way past the college this morning on the road to London."

Here he looked at his watch, and remembered that the "Flying Wonder" must have departed ere this.

"I hope you can spare time to stay with him for a while," said the doctor; "he will want careful attendance, and he seems to take kindly to you."

Robert Field felt the poor sufferer's hand clasping his, and he decided he would begin his mission of benevolence by attending this young man, to whose bedside Providence seemed to have directed his footsteps at the very outset of his journey.

"I will stay with him," he said quietly.

"Very good," said the doctor, and the grim smile broke over his face like a wave once more, furrowing his cheeks into curious lines, like ripples on a calm sea.

At this moment the old bedmaker returned, still bearing the razors as evidence of her imaginary encounter in the morning, having by this time circulated a thrilling narrative amongst her sisterhood assembled on a neighbouring staircase, who adjourned collectively by-and-by to one of the kitchens, there to discuss the subject thoroughly, with the assistance of a little gin and water.

The doctor looked severely at her, and wrote a few words in pencil on a card.

"Take this to the buttery," he said, "and tell them

it's for me, and come back with it at once. Mind, no delay, I want this room put to rights at once. His mother must not see that," he added turning to Robert Field, and pointing to the blood on the floor.

The old woman hobbled off as fast as she could, and soon returned with a large jug of warm drink, specially concocted by the cook on the doctor's order.

He dropped some laudanum into it from a pocket phial, and then held it to his patient's lips, who drained it to the last few drops. The doctor then covered him up warmly, and ordered the window-shutters to be closed.

"He may sleep a little now," he said, "and then we shall try to move him; but there will be a reaction by-and-by. I wish his mother would come before I leave."

The old attendant now obtained the assistance of one of her cronies, and both were soon busy on the floor removing all traces of the accident. The doctor retired to the outer room and took up a book. Robert Field remained by his friend's bedside listening to his low moaning and incoherent rambling talk, from which he guessed the secret of his attachment to Martha Fletcher, whose name fell often from the sick man's lips. This gave him a new interest in the sufferer. His thoughts reverted to the quiet vicarage at Lawley, and the last glimpse he had seen of Rachel, and he felt happy in the idea that his present occupation was one which would meet with her warm approval.

He was roused from his reverie by a hurried step and eager female voice in the next room addressing the good doctor, who was speaking hopefully in reply. Mrs. Maltby had arrived to take charge with him of the unfortunate student, who now lay there so helpless, and whom she had left last evening so proud and hopeful.

"Surely," she said, lifting up her hands, "who can tell what a day may bring forth?"

"These cases are invariably sudden, madam," said the physician, "whether brought forth by day or night. The sooner your son is removed, the better; but it is desirable that you should not see him just at present. If you will give me your address, and return home to make the necessary arrangements, I shall see him safely removed within an hour."

"Oh! may I not see him for an instant?" said Mrs. Maltby in an imploring tone.

The doctor shook his head.

"He is in good hands," said he; "your presence might excite him. You shall see him by-and-by in your own house."

"Sir," she said gently, "my home is at Lauterdale, and I only arrived here yesterday; but I reside with a good woman named Clayton, not far off, who I am sure will take him in."

"Dora Clayton?" said he. "I know—very good old lady—nice lodgings. We shall take him there at once if you will be so good as to go on before and make ready to receive him. Permit me, madam, to attend

you to the porter's lodge. I shall bring your son immediately in my own carriage. Mrs. Maltby had to submit, as the doctor was inexorable; indeed, his polite escort was only meant to expedite her departure. He then looked in on the Master, who was in the middle of his breakfast, and readily gave permission for the removal of the patient.

"An excellent young man," he said warmly; "one of the most promising graduates in the college. But, doctor, do you really feel certain that there has been no violence, because if there is a shadow of doubt on your mind I shall have a searching inquiry. Jones says," he continued, again producing the deposition and fixing his spectacles on his nose, "that at a quarter to eight—no, a quarter past eight—Mr. Maltby returned within the precincts, but did not speak to, or salute, or otherwise notice the porters in the lodge, which was unusual on his part, and that he, Jones, particularly noticed——"

Here the doctor cut in suddenly, "I know, I know—very observant man, Jones; but there has been no violence, my dear sir, only a little accidental injury, and too much work here," he said, touching his forehead. "Wet clothes,—neglect,—fever;—better in his mother's care at present;—I shall report daily how he gets on, but we must have him away at once."

"By all means, doctor—by all means," said the Master, upon whose eloquence the word "fever" acted like cold water; and then he hastily beat a retreat into his study, leaving his breakfast unfinished.

An hour after this interview the doctor's carriage drew up at the little garden-wicket of Mrs. Clayton's cottage. The blinds were down, but a young man descended quickly from the vehicle and proceeded up the footpath to the door, which was already opened by Mrs. Maltby, trembling with nervous excitement, and attended by her kind landlady, who had readily placed the resources of her little dwelling at her disposal.

"I am sorry, Mrs. Maltby," he began, "that I come on so unpleasant an errand, but your son has borne the journey very well. Into which room are we to bring him?"

"Bless me, it's young Mr. Field," said Mrs. Maltby. "Oh! sir, you are very good indeed." The poor mother's heart was lifted up for an instant with a little pardonable flutter of pride at the idea that her son should be so honoured as to have for his best friend the heir to the Dale property.

"His bedroom is ready upstairs, sir," said Mrs. Clayton, "if you will be so good as to bring him in."

Robert Field begged that they would both retire whilst this was being done, but as he returned from the carriage, accompanied by the doctor and one of the college attendants, bearing the sick man tenderly between them, wrapped in blankets, he caught sight of Mrs. Maltby's pale troubled face at the parlour window, and heard her sobs as they carried him upstairs to his room. They laid him on the bed and removed the stained bandage from his forehead, and when his

wound had been dressed the ladies were summoned to take charge of him, whilst the doctor retired to hold counsel with Mr. Field in an adjoining room.

"This may be a serious case," said he; "the young man has lost a great deal of blood, and may yet lose more. He will require some one with more strength than these women as soon as the present effect of the laudanum diminishes. Can you remain with him in this house during his illness?"

"I have nothing else to do at present," said Mr. Field, "and as he has fallen in my way I shall stay with him whilst I can be of use."

"Very good," said the doctor, and then he proceeded to give plain directions for the treatment of the patient, and took his leave.

On returning to the sick man's room, Robert Field found the two women kneeling by the bedside. They did not doubt the utility of earthly means, but from strong faith and habit were seeking the aid of the Great Physician on behalf of the sufferer, who was still unconscious. They both remembered, more in sorrow than with any other feeling, how disdainfully he had carried himself away from the door on the previous evening, and now that he was brought low they prayed that it might be for his soul's welfare.

Mrs. Maltby was full of thankfulness that she had been brought to Oxford at this crisis, forgetting, perhaps, that if she had remained at home it might not have arisen at all; and as for Robert Field, he was glad

to find a little benevolent work cut out for him so soon. During the night, as the doctor had foretold, he had quite enough to do in restraining the delirious patient whose care he had undertaken, as the fever assumed a very violent type, indicating intense cerebral inflammation.

It is not my purpose to weary the reader with further details of this young man's illness. For many weeks he appeared to be very near the end of his career. The medical man looked grave, and came very often to the cottage. Robert Field took a deeper interest in his friend's case every day, and was of great use during the severest period of the fever, when both strength and nerve were required. He had a bedroom in the cottage, as, fortunately, Mrs. Clayton's lodgings were then vacant; and if he sometimes felt amused by the quaint piety of the two women, he was also convinced of its genuine character, and obtained some useful experience in witnessing their simple faith. The extreme danger of his friend set him thinking seriously, and as the student began slowly to rally, they held much converse together on vital questions of deep interest to both, and so became fast friends, with united sympathies. Edward Maltby's pride and self-reliance had been shattered in the dust. He remembered his refusal to enter the house in which he now received so much kindness, and out of this suffering there sprang up within his heart the germs of a broader Christianity than any other teaching could have imparted to him. His strong prejudices against the Methodists disappeared before the daily

evidence of Mrs. Clayton's real goodness and unselfish kindness of heart.

Mrs. Maltby rejoiced greatly at this change, and was full of gratitude to her landlady and Mr. Field for the care bestowed on her son. She wrote hopefully home as to his state of mind and body, and decided she would not interfere any more in regard to his intention to enter the ministry of the Church of England. Perhaps she would not so readily have arrived at this conclusion had not Robert Field, with all the impulsiveness of his character, suddenly announced his intention to follow his friend's example and to enter his name on the books of the college.

His personal attachment to Edward Maltby had become so great, that to be near him he was willing to lay aside for a time the visionary schemes with which he had set out from Lauterdale.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE MERCHANT.

“Quick in his bargains; honest in commerce;
Just in his dealings; being much averse
From quirks of law, still ready to refer
His cause t’ an honest country arbiter.”

ANDREW SYMSON.

MY readers will, no doubt, remember the invitation given by Mr. Maltby to Jacob Grimshaw, junior, at Lauterdale, to “give him a call” on the Monday morning following the little social and religious meeting at the cottage. In accordance therewith the young man was early afoot, and on his way down the Dale to Mr. Maltby’s place of business by the river-side.

To reach his destination by the shortest way, it was not at all necessary that he should pass Mr. Maltby’s residence, but somehow on the present occasion Jacob found his feet on the longer road. It might, perhaps, have been the fault of his boots, from previous habit, but in consequence of his error he deemed it necessary to call at the cottage, and inquire if Mr. Maltby had yet gone to his office.

It was not yet eight o'clock, but Jacob knew very well that his chance of finding so energetic a man as Mr. Maltby at home at that hour was very slight. In those days business people in the Dale rose at five in summer, breakfasted before seven, and were ready for dinner at noon ; or if they did not, they were accounted as "Wastels" and "Ne'er-do-wells." As a consequence of such early rising, the consumption of candles was small indeed. Gas had not yet been introduced. Even at this day gas is looked on as an extravagance, although the modern Dale folk as a rule no longer rise with the lark as their forefathers did, excepting the operatives at the works, who are obliged to do so.

It was a bright sunny morning; and as he descended the valley, Jacob thought he saw some one in white flitting to and fro amongst the rose-trees in front of the cottage. When he had summoned sufficient courage to open the wicket and ascend the little winding footpath, he discovered, as he had hoped and expected, that the person in white was Patty Maltby. Jacob inwardly rejoiced at the good fortune which brought him again into her presence, and was pleased at this evidence of her good habits in the matter of early rising. She was clad in a light summer dress, and had on her head one of those broad-leafed straw hats which are only to be seen nowadays in pictures, on old porcelain, or in representations of primitive shepherdesses on the stage. Patty was very busy about a rose-bush, and although a very simple-mannered girl

in general, I am afraid to say was guilty of a small piece of coquetry in pretending not to see Jacob, whom she had recognised very well, as he came with a swinging stride down the hill ; and, moreover, she appeared to be somewhat startled when he abruptly addressed her.

"Miss Maltby," he said, "is thy father at home? He desired that I should call on him early this morning."

"Oh, Mr. Grimshaw, is that you?" she replied ; "father is away at the wharf more than two hours since. There was some special business to be done, and he left an hour earlier than usual. No doubt you will find him at the office. He will be here again to dinner at noon. What a lovely morning it is!" she added, clipping vigorously at the rose-tree, and seeing that Jacob was at a loss for a fresh subject of conversation.

"Truly it is," he replied ; "I am glad to see thee occupied so early. Thy garden is well taken care of."

"Do you think so?" said Patty ; "father is fond of it, and works in it a good deal in the evening : it seems to do him good after his day's work. Have you a garden, Mr. Grimshaw?"

"Yes, we have a garden, but father has ceased to care for it since the lawsuit commenced, and it is somewhat neglected of late."

"Then you should look after it. I think one is always happier in the summer-time, when the roses are out. Will you take one?" she said, snipping off a handsome white rose as she spoke.

"Thou art very kind," he answered ; and then Patty proceeded to secure the flower with a pin in the button-hole of his coat.

"Father takes a great many roses to the office," she continued, "but he likes the red ones best."

Jacob could only see the top of her hat, as he looked down on her during the fixture of the rose ; and his thoughts were wandering into strange comparisons between the article under observation and the dreadful "coal-scuttles" which adorned and concealed the heads of his female acquaintances amongst the "Friends."

"Now," said Patty, when the decoration was completed, "father will know you have been here when he sees that rose. There is not another bush of the kind in the Dale, and he will tell you the name of it."

"What is it called?" he inquired. "Thou canst tell me as well as Mr. Maltby."

"You must ask father," said Patty ; "he is very learned in roses, and likes to talk about them. See, this one I have given you has little red spots on the leaves, like drops of blood."

Jacob registered a vow that the rose in question should be a very sacred one in his eyes evermore.

"I am very thankful to thee," he said ; "it is a beautiful rose. And now perhaps I should proceed in search of thy father ; he desired that I should see him early."

"How was it you slipped away so suddenly last night?" inquired Patty. "I hope you were not

offended with the remarks of our ministers: they are good men, and anxious to benefit all whom they meet; but now and then," she added, with a smile, "they are a little too personal. Unfortunately, we had some very unpleasant people with us last evening; it will not be so when you come again. Now I must go into the house, and wish you good morning." Here she gave him her hand, which was very small, and plump, and white, and about the appearance of which she possessed a little pardonable vanity; and Jacob, although not much addicted to hand-shaking, or formal greetings of any kind, managed somehow to hold it an unusually long time in his, ere he departed in search of her father. He remembered, as he closed the little wicket, that she had spoken of his coming again, and a hope began to dawn in his bosom of some day winning the hand of this pretty maiden. Under the elation of this feeling he drew himself up, and stepped out briskly on his way; and as Patty glanced after him from the doorstep, she thought how much more erect and manly was his carriage than that of Silas Clayton.

When he reached the wharf by the river-side, he found Mr. Maltby in the thick of some urgent business, with his hands full of papers, and surrounded by bargemen and "river-side characters" of all kinds. Three of his boats were being loaded with the manufactures of the Dale Company, with whom he had a contract for river carriage. The wharf

was crowded with hollow ironware, pots, pans, and stoves of all kinds, for transmission to Bristol. It was evident from the stir and bustle that some unusual haste was necessary ; in fact, Mr. Maltby was already acting on the information given him on the previous evening by Jacob Grimshaw, and as the river was falling very fast in consequence of the unusually dry summer, he was anxious not to lose an hour in dispatching his boats, in order that they might return with the flour which the present and prospective stoppage of the mill had induced him to speculate in. Jacob stood apart, looking with interest at the busy scene on the wharf ; and Mr. Maltby was too much engrossed with his work to notice him.

Presently one of the barge foremen came up and said in a husky voice, " Muster Maltby, we be ready to shove off."

" Very good, Kershaw," he replied ; " what does she draw ? "

The man looked at a piece of notched wood he held in his horny fist, for, like most of his class on the river, he could not read or write, but could keep voluminous memoranda on these notched sticks with singular accuracy for a length of time.

" Three-six forrid, four-two aft," he replied.

" Hum," said his employer ; " I'm told there's a great deal of sand forming below Arley-ferry, Kershaw. Put her on an even keel as you drop down, but do not delay just now to shift the goods. Here's your way-bill ; and mind, if you are all back alongside the

wharf this day fortnight, you shall have a ten-pound note amongst you over and above your wages for the trip."

"All right, Muster Maltby," said Kershaw, as he solemnly proceeded to make an entry of the bargain on his timber journal by indenting sundry deep notches thereon with a huge clasp knife; then uttering a loud "Gee-up!" to the stout horses which were now standing on the towing path, he stepped on board the barge, and took the helm of the broad rudder required to keep this unwieldy sort of craft in its course against the pull of the towing-line. The driver cracked his whip, and the horses dug their feet into the bank as they bent their strong legs to the strain necessary to start the heavy boat, which moved off slowly at first from its moorings, and then more rapidly as it felt the force of the current.

When the barge had got fairly under way, Mr. Maltby turned, and saw young Grimshaw.

"Ha! Jacob, lad," he said, "I'm glad to see thee. We are busy, you see, loading for Bristol. Come with me into the office."

Here his quick eye caught sight of the rose in Jacob's button-hole, which he closely scanned for an instant.

"Been to the cottage?" he said, inquiringly, with a smile.

"Yes," said Jacob, turning very red; "Miss Maltby gave it to me."

"Thought so," said Mr. Maltby; "there's not another like it to be had elsewhere in the Dale," and

his eyes twinkled merrily, as he led the way to his office.

He had noticed Jacob's changing colour as he spoke about the rose, and thought none the worse of him for it; but Jacob felt somewhat guilty, and had not courage to inquire the name of the particular specimen at present. When they had entered the office, which was situated at a corner so as to secure a good view of the river and the landing-place, Mr. Maltby handed some documents to one of his clerks, who immediately proceeded to take his master's place outside on the wharf.

"Jacob," said Mr. Maltby, when they were alone, "I don't like this lawsuit, but I fear it is useless to speak to your father until he has spent some of his spare cash with Mr. Quetchett, and meanwhile you will fall into idle ways, lad. What do you say to trying a spell with me? I'm about to send Mr. Evans to take charge at Bristol, as my agent there is going into business on his own account, and I think you might take his place here. The Dale folk must have bread, Jacob, and as your father won't grind the flour, why, we must try to fetch them some until he changes his mind."

"I shall be very glad to accept thy offer," said Jacob, "if thou thinkest father will not object."

"I'll answer for that," said Mr. Maltby. "If he does, why, you can leave at an hour's notice. I shall write to him to-day, lad, and if you wish you can join to-morrow—the sooner the better. Evans is paid a hundred a year," he continued, "and is a steady fellow.

He began at sixty pounds three years since. When you can do his work you shall have the same salary as he has now. At present, if you please, we shall say eighty pounds to begin with."

"I fear I'm not worth it," said Jacob.

"Well, then, try to be so as soon as you can," said Mr. Maltby; "and now let's go back to the wharf."

When they arrived again at the river-side, the other two barges were ready to start. Mr. Maltby repeated his injunctions to the men in charge, and also the promise of the extra ten pounds, and then the boats were drawn off rapidly down the river in the same manner as that steered by Kershaw. When they were out of sight, Mr. Maltby took Jacob over his premises, showed him the great malting-floors and kilns, the cooperage, and the new brewery he had recently erected, and explained the nature of his business, and the uses of each department in his extensive concerns. He also asked many questions about the flour trade—as to the present supplies in the retail dealers' hands, and the credit which it might be safe to give to each one. Jacob readily answered all his queries, although he clearly perceived their drift. But he had now entered Mr. Maltby's service, and had decided to serve him in every way to the best of his ability.

Whether he would so readily have communicated the secrets of his father's business to any other person than Patty's father is an open question, which I leave to my readers to answer for themselves. At this period Jacob had formed the resolution to win the young girl's

favour by every fair means in his power, and one of the necessary steps to that end was, in his opinion, first to win the good opinion of her parent. Whether Mr. Maltby was perfectly justified in obtaining information in this way or not may be also doubted ; but it is fair to say that he had fully decided to restore the trading in flour and breadstuffs to the elder Grimshaw whenever that irate miller got rid of the present "bee in his bonnet," and resumed his proper business, at present in abeyance. He fully calculated, from his personal knowledge of the old man, that a considerable time would elapse ere that event could take place, and meantime the Dale folk would run short of flour, and some stranger with less scruples might step in and take the custom, and perhaps retain it, and at all events get the profit which Mr. Maltby hoped to make by his present active speculation. Added to this argument, which he had duly turned over in his mind that morning in a little controversy with his conscience, there was the evident advantage to young Grimshaw of having remunerative and useful employment in his office. It was this final and very plausible reason that turned the scale, and decided Mr. Maltby to go into the flour trade ; and "now that it was Monday," his conscience no longer troubled him about extracting information from Jacob, to whose father he wrote the same day to say, that observing the lad was without employment, and likely to get into mischief in consequence, he had ventured to offer him a *temporary* engagement in his office, at a small salary, until work was

resumed at the mill. Mr. Maltby underlined the word *temporary*, although it meant a considerable period in his private opinion, and conceived it would be wiser not to say anything about the particular trade in which he proposed to employ the miller's son. It may be as well to say here, that Mr. Grimshaw replied thanking his friend for his thoughtful care of the youth, and sanctioning the arrangement until such time as the lawsuit was decided ; the remainder of his letter, which was a long one, being full of bitter things against the Dale Company in reference to his grievances, over which Mr. Maltby ran his eye carelessly, until he came to a passage at the end much underscored, to the effect that he, Jacob Grimshaw the elder, would never raise the sluices of his mill again until he had obtained the victory he fully expected over "them darned old Quakers, the Fields." Mr. Maltby smiled at this strongly-worded conclusion, coming from a man who had once been a "Friend" himself, professing to turn the other cheek to the smiter, and to swear not at all, and then he sighed deeply at the weakness of human nature, particularly the perverse nature of millers when engaged in litigation.

This letter arrived when young Jacob had been a week in his service, and had shown himself an active, intelligent, and trustworthy clerk, painstaking and diligent in all the details of the business, and yet shrewd in his grasp of its leading principles.

During this period Jacob saw a good deal of Patty. Mr. Maltby had kindly arranged that as his new clerk's dwelling-place was so far from the office, and as he was

so lonely, he should take his meals and spend his evenings at the cottage during the first weeks of his engagement, whilst Mrs. Maltby was absent at Oxford. In this way Mr. Maltby contrived "to kill two birds at the same time." He thereby increased his stock of information regarding the flour trade, as he found Jacob much more communicative on the subject when they talked confidentially in the garden amongst the roses in the evening, whilst Patty sat by and listened very demurely, working diligently all the while at some fancy trifle, in the progress of which Jacob took an unusual interest. Mr. Maltby had also the satisfaction of thinking that in this way the young man's evenings would be rendered happier, and his mind improved ; at all events, he would thus be still further kept out of the chance of mischief during his father's absence.

There was one subject tacitly avoided by both, and that was the lawsuit, on which they were likely to differ in opinion, inasmuch as Mr. Maltby privately sided with the Dale Company, but did not exactly know why, as the real merits of the case were known to very few, and were complicated in their nature ; whilst Jacob was fully convinced that his father was right, and also perfectly understood the technicalities of the dispute, having from boyhood been duly instructed therein by his litigious parent.

Jacob now went regularly to chapel twice on Sundays, and sat in Mr. Maltby's pew, and was as attentive as he possibly could be to the sermons. He rose rapidly

in Mr. Slowman's estimation in consequence, but it is probable that Silas Clayton would have had a higher opinion of him if he had occupied some other seat, at a greater distance from "his friend Patty;" and also he particularly desired that the young man should come provided with a hymn-book of his own.



CHAPTER XVIII.

RIVALS.

“ He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn :
A sadder and a wiser man
He rose the morrow morn.”

COLERIDGE.

IN those days the correspondence between Silas Clayton and his mother at Oxford increased considerably. There were many interesting details to tell of Edward Maltby's serious illness, conveyed with grave charges that he should not alarm Miss Maltby or her father in repeating them.

Silas considered it necessary to call very often at the cottage with reference to these communications. It was understood that Mrs. Maltby, who was a very bad correspondent at the best of times, could not write very often at present in consequence of her nursing duties. Mrs. Clayton was therefore deputed to inform the family of the invalid's progress by deputy at Lauterdale; and the deputy certainly attended diligently to the matter. Nothing was said openly between the two “maternals” as to the advantages of this little

arrangement, but it was clearly understood, and they both took much comfort in the thought that the young people would thus be brought a good deal together, and would have much to say to one another on so interesting a subject as the health of the young lady's brother. There is no doubt that this little piece of female diplomacy would have answered admirably, and perhaps the hopes of the two good women would have been realised but for that other arrangement of Mr. Maltby's, as to young Jacob Grimshaw's spending his evenings at the cottage, where he made himself very useful. The early summer evenings were dry and warm; the garden was in full bloom; but the extra luxuriance of the climbing roses, spreading over the porch and the south front of the cottage, required training and pruning, and Jacob set diligently to work on the top of a ladder to reduce the chaos to order, and did it very well, under Patty's supervision. There was also a good deal of watering to be done amongst the rose-trees, and it was evidently an occupation eminently adapted for a lady and gentleman, the heavier part of the supply falling properly to Jacob's share, and the proper distribution to Patty. It appeared as if the clerk of the Weather Office was in league with the little god during that month—it rained so seldom, and consequently the garden required so much water, and also in out-of-the-way corners, which, in previous years, had done very well with the natural supply from the clouds. Silas Clayton came to help occasionally, and was generally sent "to man the pump," which was in an enclosed yard behind the

house, in which he had to work under the surveillance of the two maids, who could see him from the kitchen windows, where he was conscious that they were laughing at him all the time. Very flushed his pale face became in consequence of this, and of his fierce efforts to raise the necessary supply in the shortest possible time, like a bucket bird. He generally managed to spill the greater part over his shoes in hurriedly carrying it to the place required, and on such occasions Patty very considerably urged him to go into the house at once to dry his feet at the kitchen fire. This he always did in the most obedient manner, but again, unfortunately, under the inspection of those lively handmaidens, who understood it all very well, and had long since set him down as "nowhere" in the race with Jacob for the hand of Miss Patty. They wondered "he didn't see he was in the way," but he only saw that the other gentleman was much more so. Poor Silas was decidedly *de trop* amongst the roses, and began at last to think of doing something desperate ere it became too late. Unfortunately, he received some encouragement from his mother to try his fate about this time. The two ladies at Oxford became more confidential as time went on and the patient slowly recovered; as Mrs. Maltby's anxiety decreased, her gratitude to the good woman in whose house he lay, and who had aided so materially in nursing him, became very fervent. She could think of no better way to repay the kindness shown to her son at Oxford than by doing something for her friend's son

at Lauterdale, in the matter of that little love affair of his, as yet unspoken of on his part, but known to both women almost as well as he knew it in his own heart. Mrs. Maltby had said to Mrs. Clayton, in strict confidence of course, that she wished him every success, and that she suspected her daughter was not altogether indifferent; and Mrs. Clayton had written the precise words in still stricter confidence to Silas the same day.

Now, although mothers may be certain in their diagnosis of any little heart affection in the case of male offspring, let them beware how they venture on a decided opinion where their daughters are concerned. The very nature of the sex envelops the interesting subject in doubt and mystery, and the symptoms of the disease are never apparent on the surface. The young man, as a rule, must tell some one of his case, and is apt to make a confidante of his mother or of his sister. But the young lady, if she has any sense or character at all—and Patty had plenty of both—will, in nine cases out of ten, keep her little secret to herself.

Mrs. Maltby had unfortunately set her heart a good deal on having the young Wesleyan minister for a son-in-law. She knew well enough that his salary barely sufficed to keep him alive and decently clad, but then her well-to-do husband was able and willing to give Patty what was considered a very good fortune amongst the Dale folk, and Mrs. Maltby thought the sum would be ample for both; and as she had met such a disappointment as regards her own son, this little

scheme of her's seemed to be the next best thing to look forward to.

As regards Patty's own feeling on the subject, Mrs. Maltby did not doubt that her hitherto obedient and affectionate daughter would be influenced by her wishes ; and, on the whole, she thought Patty rather liked Silas, although she laughed at him occasionally. Then there was the useful fact to be remembered that she believed her daughter cared for no one else, and indeed knew no one to care for.

From this it may be inferred that, although Patty wrote very often and dutifully to her mother, she had not thought it necessary to say anything as yet about Jacob Grimshaw, or of that arrangement of Mr. Maltby's as to the young clerk's spending his evenings at the cottage, and boarding with the family.

It was curious that the good lady left the consideration of her husband's opinion or wishes out of the case altogether. She was doubtful whether Silas Clayton's proposal would be favourably received by him, and she knew very well that her son would oppose it by every means in his power, and would probably induce Mr. Maltby to side with him ; but her husband was, as she thought, so accustomed to defer to her better judgment and experience in all domestic questions, that she anticipated but little difficulty with him, provided Patty consented.

Now, this was Mrs. Maltby's particular weakness. She believed that her good husband acted always and altogether on her advice and opinion, and there-

fore she gave him plenty of both on every possible occasion.

John Maltby never openly differed from her; indeed, on the contrary, he always appeared to defer to the wisdom for which she gave herself credit; and yet it is probable that no married man in England got more of his own way, or did more what seemed good in his own eyes, both as regards his children and his business—only he never appeared to do so. In this lay his great skill and tact; and probably this apparent submission of his was the secret of the peculiar share of domestic peace he was generally believed to enjoy. He had managed somehow that his son should go to Oxford, and yet no one ever imagined he was anything but passive in the arrangement; and it is also quite possible he had made up his mind that his daughter should not marry Silas Clayton, to live a nomadic life at a distance from him evermore, although no one ever gave him the smallest credit for an idea on the subject, and even Patty, with all her natural shrewdness, scarcely deemed it necessary to conceal the little serious flirtation which went on every evening in the garden.

But as Mr. Maltby sat under the shadow of the trellised porch, half smothered in roses, inhaling their fragrance, and at the same time enjoying his long Broseley pipe, in which he smoked the choicest tobacco to be had for love or money (of the quality of which, as of most articles of merchandise, he was an excellent judge), there was a merry twinkle in his eye and a slight curl about the corners of his mouth, which broke

into an absolute smile as he heard Silas labouring at the pump in the rear of the premises, whilst his merry daughter and Jacob were "galavanting" under his very nose.

Truly, if Silas could only have seen with the eyes of the man whose son-in-law elect he almost considered himself to be on that evening, he would never have taken his mother's advice, nor gone down on the well-worn knees of those black trousers of his for the first and last time in his life for any other purpose than a devotional one. But his mother's letter, and the continued attentions of that dark-eyed, stalwart young miller, whose object was now evident enough to Silas, were too much for him, and so he rushed blindly on his fate, and came to know the worst, which, to a man of his sensitive organization, was very bad for him to know just then.

When the hour of "tea" approached, it was Patty's custom to leave the two young men and her father in the garden whilst she went indoors to get the evening meal in readiness. Tea was a good substantial affair in the Dale, with men who had dined at twelve o'clock and worked hard ever since, and it always took some little time in preparation, but was worth the trouble of waiting for when Patty was housekeeper. This was the only opportunity which Silas could obtain of seeing her alone for five minutes.

Five minutes is generally time enough for a declaration when a man has his mind made up and means to do it, and as a safe rule it is not wise to try the lady's

patience with preliminaries for any greater length of time. If she is in doubt as to the answer she means to give, the less time she has to turn it over in her mind the better; and if she means to say yes, the sooner he hears the little murmur, and finds himself absurdly happy or strangely and unexpectedly dejected in consequence, as the case may be, the better it is. "Barkis is willin'" was probably the best form of proposal ever made by any sane male biped, and was better understood than if the individual had spoken like a book.

But there is always another element of success in these cases besides *time*, and that is *opportunity*. Beware, rash youth, how you try your chance at the wrong time and place. Before breakfast is ridiculous; no right-minded young lady is to be seen at all on urgent private affairs at such a time. The early part of the day is unsafe in general, especially if the sun is hot, as it tries the temper and the complexion, and there may be a headache after last night's ball, when you are said to have both behaved so very foolishly in public. Tiffin time is decidedly dangerous; there is always some one near whom you wish a hundred miles away; and nowadays ladies make such capital luncheons that it is utterly impossible to be sentimental afterwards. Of course, no one but a lunatic would think of disturbing a delicate young female's digestive organs by such a momentous question after dinner, no matter how long it may have been expected previously. On the whole, it is safer to wait until the ordinary work of daily sustentation is over. After a nice light supper is generally a capital

opportunity, especially if the champagne is good, and has been appreciated by both parties. Of course, I mean only the slightest possible appreciation. If you can manage a little effective moonlight, viewed from a dimly lit conservatory, or, still better, "by the sad sea waves," the chances are nine to one in your favour, and it is to be hoped you won't live long enough to repent the occasion.

Now, Silas Clayton ought to have known better than to trouble Patty Maltby whilst she was preparing tea. Fancy a young girl listening to a very excited clergyman on his knees whilst she holds a bright copper kettle of boiling water suspended in air, ready to simmer over on his nose under the slightest provocation. There was no necessity for kneeling at all, only he thought it was the correct thing to do. There was nothing of novelty in the posture, so far as he was concerned. Any effect to be given to the proposal by the position was quite done away with by the fact that Patty had seen him kneeling so often before, and naturally associated the movement with long prayers. She knew the instant he entered the parlour what he had come for, and she would have dexterously evaded the scene if she could, had he not gone down before her with a suddenness acquired by long practice, which quite astounded her for the moment.

The appeal made by the unhappy and excited young man was, like some of his sermons, highflown, fluent, and overwrought—moreover, very lengthy. I shall not repeat any of it, because it was a bad example of its

kind, and it is not my wish to make him appear in the least ridiculous. The maiden's answer was concise enough, as she placed the kettle on its stand, and the answer was made as soon as it was possible to interrupt his address.

"Mr. Clayton," she said, "I am very sorry, but it cannot be; I can never be more to you than a friend."

The clear decision of her tone went to his heart at once, and seemed at the same time to lift a veil from his eyes. He saw, with singularly rapid reaction of mind, how foolish in every way was his proposal, and how absurd was his manner of making it, and therefore he remained silent and distressed, still on his knees, apparently studying the pattern of the carpet with fixed eyes, like one stunned by a sudden blow.

"Mr. Clayton," said Patty, "please to rise; it is not seemly."

Poor Silas at her bidding rose at once, and mechanically dusted his knees with his pocket-handkerchief, as he had been wont to do on other occasions. He was very pale, his eyes seemed to have an unnatural light in them, and his lips quivered, as he spoke slowly, with deep emotion.

"I have been in a dream, Miss Maltby," he said, "in a foolish dream,—but you will forgive me, and forget what I have said. I am awaking to the truth," he continued, "painfully awaking, and I shall be wiser in future—yes, wiser. I shall go away for a little while, and come again, perhaps, by-and-by."

And then he went quietly out to a little retired corner of the garden, where none could see or hear him, and there he wept bitterly. Let no one think the worse of him for his tears.

He did not return to the cottage that evening, but stole away unobserved when the others went in to tea. When Mr. Maltby inquired of Patty as to the cause of his absence, he received no answer, but he saw that something unusual had happened, as her eyes were filled with tears. Shortly afterwards she pleaded a headache, and retired to her own room, there to take herself seriously to task as to the pain she had been compelled to inflict on the young minister. She had always thought of him with grave respect and kindness, but nothing more ; now she called to mind every careless word or act of hers which might have been construed by him into a warmer sentiment, and repented very much of what appeared to her to be blamable levity of manner. She feared that others would blame her also, especially her mother ; and finally she worked her little brain into a state of real headache, and made her blue eyes very red with weeping.

When this was over she felt relieved, and by-and-by she began to think of the matter more calmly, and to wonder why Mr. Clayton had made such a very sudden declaration at all, and especially why he should have thought it necessary to do so on his knees. At length it occurred to her that in some way it must have had to do with the presence of young Jacob, and then Patty felt herself blushing very red, although

there was no one by to see it, and fell to thinking about the latter and his devoted attention until she found herself pondering ere long whether he, too, would some day come to her with the same story as Silas Clayton, and, if so, would she give him the same answer?

About this question she was as yet uncertain ; but of one thing she felt sure, that if he ever did, he certainly would not go down on his knees or look ridiculous.



CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE RIVER.

“Yet why?—a silvery current flows
With uncontrolled meanderings;
Nor have these eyes by greener hills
Been soothed in all my wanderings.”

WORDSWORTH.

THE promise made to Kershaw, the bargeman, on the wharf by Mr. Maltby, as to a certain ten-pound note to be distributed amongst the crews of the three boats in the event of their safe return within a fortnight, was an unfortunate promise. Mr. Maltby knew very well when he made it that the money would be expended in drink as soon as it could be exchanged for that commodity at the “Jolly Bargeman,” a low public-house by the river-side, beyond the stringent jurisdiction of the Dale Company. His men, as a rule, were sober men, and could be trusted with his property to great distances, but it was a point of honour with the river-side fraternity to expend all windfalls, such as Mr. Maltby had promised them, in a general carouse, which lasted as long as any of the money remained, and usually terminated in a free fight.

Mr. Maltby had some misgivings about the wisdom of the offer he had made, and felt that he was in some way an accessory before the fact to the debauch in which his money would be spent, if the men should succeed in earning it. He also began to think that he had entered on this new trade in flour somewhat under a spiritual cloud. He was a man of sensitive conscience, and of scrupulous honour in all his dealings, but he had gone into this speculation hastily, and had been carried away by the energy of his character. In self-examination, he feared that he had been somewhat lax in the righteous discharge of his duty to his neighbour, or at all events had fallen into an error of judgment, which now pressed on his mind until it assumed considerable magnitude, and caused him much uneasiness.

He blamed himself severely for having first thought of this venture on a Sunday evening. He was a strict observer of the Sabbath, and his bargemen had positive orders to remain at anchor, wherever they were, from six o'clock on Saturday evening until six o'clock on Monday morning, but he feared they would disregard this order on the present trip, on account of the promised reward.

Other barge-owners laughed at Mr. Maltby's scruples, and their men jeered at and derided his servants as they passed them on the river on Sundays, moored to the bank whilst the horses grazed idly along the towing-path. Still, it was generally admitted that Mr. Maltby's boats met with fewer accidents than any others, and, on the whole, he had thriven better than

any other trader or carrier between Lauterdale and Bristol.

On the second Sunday after the inharmonious meeting at the cottage, Mr. Maltby felt instinctively that Kershaw and his companions were breaking the fourth commandment. This feeling grew stronger as he sat under Mr. Slowman in chapel, until it amounted to an absolute conviction in his mind ; and, singularly enough, the conviction was correct.

Kershaw and his fellow-bargemen had been cracking on full speed all the morning in their course up the river ; and about mid-day, just when Mr. Maltby felt his keenest twinge of conscience, the leading barge, steered by Kershaw himself, ran aground on the Knowle Sands, and there the boat stuck hard and fast. Being closely followed by the second boat, also towed at speed, she was struck heavily on the quarter, and began to leak.

Mr. Maltby said afterwards that "he had felt the shock in all his bones," as he walked pensively home after the service, whilst Patty and Jacob went on in front with hearts as light as gossamer.

He always attributed this accident to the offer of the unlucky ten pounds already alluded to. It also appeared to him that there was an appearance of sharp practice in making use of the miller's son to get hold of the miller's trade and customers.

Now, in Mr. Maltby's cottage there was a closet always set apart for one purpose, then a recognised institution amongst Wesleyans, in literal accordance

with the Scripture injunction. Into this room his wife had formerly taken her son's letter, and into it he now took this matter that weighed on his conscience.

John Maltby had carried many troubles in his life into that little chamber and laid them down there; but he required no priest to hear his self-accusing *Mea culpa*, or to stand between him and the God whom he served. None may witness the wrestling of that humble-minded Christian with his Maker; but those who saw him issue forth with the light of faith upon his face, knew that he had triumphed, and that his way was made plain to him.

When he came out, his resolution was taken, and his mind was at rest. It was a simple, straightforward resolve, characteristic of the man and of his life. If the trip resulted in loss, he would accept it cheerfully, as evidence that he had been led astray from the narrow path by the arch enemy, and with thankfulness for being permitted to see his error so soon. If there should arise any profit out of this venture, one-third should be paid to Jacob, one-third to aid the "Cause"—as the support of the Wesleyan ministry was always called—and one-third he would retain as his own share.

Mr. Maltby rejoined his daughter and Jacob with a light heart. The matter in hand was settled, and the remainder of the day was spent, as usual, with cheerfulness; for Mr. Maltby's religion was not a gloomy religion, and he was naturally a happy man, with the knack of infusing his cheerfulness into those around him.

Mr. Slowman came to supper on that Sunday evening,

but Silas Clayton was absent. No one noticed his absence during the meal; but when the young people had retired to the drawing-room, where Patty's musical arrangements were no longer in danger of being overturned by the Perks family, Mr. Slowman laid his broad palm on Mr. Maltby's knee, and said with seriousness, "Our friend Silas has had a great blow, Mr. Maltby. He is hit very hard here," he added, laying the other hand on his wide shirt-front, which was generally deficient in buttons. Then, after a pause, in which he scrutinised Mr. Maltby's face in vain, he continued: "But no doubt it is for the best—he is young, and will get over it, and it may be a buffeting to direct him into the path prepared for him. I believe he has decided to go out with the mission to New Zealand; he feels a call to that benighted land. Poor lad," he said with a deep sigh, "he had set his heart on Patty; but I do not think she is to blame."

"I'm sure she's not," said Mr. Maltby rising immediately to proceed to the drawing-room, and evidently anxious to change the subject. As he walked out, he added with a little severity, "I have other views for my daughter, Mr. Slowman."

Mr. Slowman started in surprise at this unusual manner of speech from his host, from whom he had hitherto never heard a word on family affairs, and then he pondered on the circumstance for a little. It was observed that during the rest of the evening he looked with considerable interest at the "lost sheep," now

evidently inclined to come into the fold quietly enough by the side of Patty; and it is also probable he formed a pretty correct opinion as to the quarter to which Mr. Maltby's "other views" were directed.

When Jacob arrived at the office by the river-side next morning, which he always did punctually at seven o'clock, notwithstanding that he still took the road by the cottage, he observed some unusual excitement amongst the men on the wharf, some of whom were assembled round one of the drivers who stood by a jaded horse, and was energetically describing some occurrence on the river.

Jacob approached, and recognised the man as the individual who had driven the horses which had towed the barge steered by Kershaw. "What's the matter, men?" he said.

"Why, sir," said an old hand, who was generally spokesman amongst the bargemen, "two of the boats is aground below Arley, and this 'ere lad's ridden all night t' let Muster Maltby know as how Jem Kershaw wants help t' save the flour in's boat, as is stove, and under water."

The messenger now took up the narrative, and described the actual situation of the boats, and the state of the cargo in the first barge, a considerable portion of which he feared would be lost unless Kershaw received speedy assistance.

Jacob turned immediately and retraced his steps to the cottage, as Mr. Maltby had not yet arrived at his office. He was sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but

he knew that time was of much consequence in this matter. He found his employer out in the garden with Patty, amongst the rose-trees, where he often lingered in the morning ere he proceeded to his business, snipping off a specimen here and there for his office bouquet, which Patty tied up and arranged for him.

As Mr. Maltby saw Jacob approaching, he instinctively knew something was wrong, and hastened to meet him at the wicket.

"Well, Jacob," he said anxiously, "what is it?"

"Two of thy boats are aground down the river," said Jacob. "One of them is leaking, and in need of immediate assistance lest the cargo be lost."

"Ha!" said Mr. Maltby, turning away silently for a few moments, during which he revolved the whole subject in his mind. "Jacob," he said seriously at length, "never think of business on Sunday, lad; it's sure to come to loss in the end."

"I hope the barges can be got off before the river falls much lower," said Jacob; "and as to the flour, it can be dried and re-dressed if father will allow me to use the mill. It will sell at a reduced price of course, but the sooner it's recovered the better."

"How many empty boats are at the wharf?" said Mr. Maltby, brightening up at once with his usual energy.

"Two, and a third partly loaded," was the reply.

"Have her cleared out at once, Jacob, and order them all to be ready to start in less than an hour. I shall go down myself, and if you like you may come."

"I shall be very glad," said Jacob.

Then followed minute instructions as to the men and appliances to be taken on board the boats to the rescue of Kershaw. To carry these out Jacob returned to the wharf, whilst Mr. Maltby remained behind to get some travelling equipment ready, and also to arrange the commissariat department with Patty, who set to work diligently in packing a small basket of provisions. Whilst this was going on, it occurred to Mr. Maltby that his daughter had never been down the river, and also that she would be alone during his absence.

"Patty," he said smiling, "would you like to come with us? Jacob's going down, and we shall want some one to see to our provender."

"Yes, father," she replied, blushing, "I should like it very much if I should not be in the way."

"Then get ready at once, lass, and drive down with the basket to the wharf within an hour. If you delay longer, we shall all be gone."

With this he kissed her on both cheeks, and strode away rapidly to the river-side.

There he gave directions to the men to rig an old sail on a spar as a sort of awning on the deck of one of his boats, and ordered a strong tackle and crab winch with several spars to be placed in another boat, which immediately preceded him down the river. The third boat, which was altogether empty, was to be towed astern of the second barge, on which the awning had been rigged, and which now only awaited the arrival of Miss Maltby.

Patty had done her best to be punctual, but an hour is a short time for a young lady to pack up her modest requirements for a journey, and to get her bonnet on, besides driving over half a mile to the river; and consequently an extra half-hour had elapsed before she arrived on the wharf. She sprang lightly on the deck of the barge, where her father and Jacob awaited her.

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were bright with the excitement caused by haste and the joyful anticipation of a pleasant trip; and as Jacob arranged a seat for her on a coil of rope under the awning, he thought her prettier than she had ever looked before. In a few minutes the two barges were unmoored from the wharf, and were gliding swiftly down stream past the ruins of the old iron furnaces on the river bank, which looked like huge forts erected to bar the passage. After a rapid run of about four miles, they approached a small hamlet celebrated for the manufacture of chains and anchors.

As they neared the place, Mr. Maltby, who had been silently planning the method he would adopt for raising the sunken barge, directed the steersman to run close in to an old timber jetty which projected into the river. He immediately landed and proceeded to one of the chain factories, with the owner of which he was acquainted, and whom he found busy in proving a strong chain on a draw-bench worked by levers.

The man, although a wealthy manufacturer, was clad in a blacksmith's leather apron, and had a greasy paper cap on his head. He held a slate and pencil in

his hands, with which he recorded the strains applied by his men to the stout chain under proof. Occasionally he tapped the links with a hammer, marking such as he deemed defective with chalk, in order that they should be cut out and replaced.

The din of the blacksmiths' hammers and the roar of their forge fires rendered it impossible for Mr. Maltby to explain what he required in the workshop, and therefore he intimated his desire for an interview elsewhere. The swarthy old chainmaker threw his apron over his shoulder, and followed Mr. Maltby outside.

"Hazelton," said the latter, "I want a very strong chain to haul one of my boats off the sands."

"I've got nothing as 'ull stan' twenty tons, 'cept yonder cheen on the proof-bench," replied the grimy chainmaker, in a slow deep voice.

"Let me have it, then, like a good fellow," said Mr. Maltby.

"Nay, nay, Muster Maltby, you shanna buy a cheen o' me that's not bin through the press and kin be warranted. I dunna loike some leenks in yon cheen you seen me pullin' of jest noo, and I mean to hev 'em oot. It's meaan't for Gov'ment sarvice, and Jock Hazelton 'ull not put his brand on a bad leenk for its weight in goold."

"Lend it me, then, for a day," said Mr. Maltby. "I'm in a fix, Hazelton, and shall return the chain to-morrow evening."

The man removed his paper cap and scratched his

shock head dubiously. He remembered that Mr. Maltby was a good customer, and he feared to disoblige him. On the other hand, he never allowed an unproved chain to leave his factory.

"It mun be at yer own risk, Muster Maltby," he said at length, "and only as a parteeckler feevor to a customer."

"At my own risk, of course," said Mr. Maltby; "and many thanks, Hazelton. I shall send up for it at once."

He then returned to the barge, and gave his men orders to ship the chain.

At this place the river made a great bend, and afterwards returned in the direction of its original course. On the horseshoe-shaped piece of land thus formed was situated a noble mansion, surrounded by a splendid deer park, the country seat of a great ironmaster, who derived a vast income from works and collieries in the Black Country, about thirty miles off. We shall visit the neighbourhood of these works by-and-by, and see the kind of habitations in which the workmen and colliers live, by way of contrast. We shall also see the men at their work, the tangible result of which was visible in this magnificent estate.

A footpath led across the property, by which pedestrians were enabled to save a considerable distance by leaving the towing-path and rejoining it again at another point in the curve. It occurred to Mr. Maltby, who knew every foot of the ground intimately, that it would be a pleasant diversion to go by the footpath

with Jacob and his daughter whilst his men were loading the heavy chain on board the barge. He therefore proposed that they should take a small basket with luncheon, and proceed across the neck of land on foot to a point lower down the river, at which they could meet the barges again.

The path led through beautiful woodlands, broken here and there by great rocks of red sandstone, and in a shady nook at the foot of one of these, near a streamlet of clear water, they sat them down to a repast, deftly arranged on the grass by Patty. Mr. Maltby had almost forgotten the unpleasant accident which had caused his journey, and was in his most genial humour. He was in the prime of life, active, healthy, and intelligent; and the warm sun and beautiful scenery around them seemed to bring out bright gems of thought and experience from the treasure-house of his memory. Long afterwards that pleasant hour was remembered by his daughter as a green spot in her life, but it was the last to be so enjoyed by him whose large heart and cheerful mind gave a zest to the beauty of the scene around them, and made them linger unconsciously over the simple meal.

Mr. Maltby suddenly looked at his watch, and started to his feet.

"We have forgotten the boats," he said. "They must have rounded the point long since, and are waiting for us."

Then the basket was rapidly repacked, and in a short time they reached the river again and re-embarked.

The scenery was now very fine on both banks. On one side rose noble cliffs surmounted by fine timber, whose foliage was already changing to varied hues ; on the other lay a great sweep of rich meadow land, dotted over with white-faced cattle ; whilst here and there peeped out the red-tiled roof and brown walls of a snug homestead. They had now passed beyond the area of the coalfield, and the horizon was no longer tinged with the smoke from the furnaces. The river ran clear over a pebbly bed, and fish could be seen glancing in the sunlight as they leaped round the bows of the boats. The men who steered the barges shouted to one another, and sprang rapidly from side to side with the long tillers, as they followed the tortuous shallow channel.

Mr. Maltby looked anxiously at his watch and at the rocks and shallows they passed, which indicated that the water was unusually low for the time of year. A month later the navigation was generally totally suspended, but never in his memory had he seen the stream so clear and shallow in July.

Presently, as they rounded a sharp bend, there rose up before them a picturesque town, perched on the summit of a great red sandstone rock. It had once been a strongly fortified place, but Cromwell and Ireton had pitched their camps round about it, and battered its walls and bastions into ruins. Mr. Maltby pointed out the earthworks of a battery, in shape like a pudding pan inverted, which, it was said, had been thrown up in one night by the Parliamentary forces.

Here they procured two extra horses, and now sped

along at increased speed, so that by three o'clock they reached the wire ferry at Arley, which was run out from its posts and lowered into the river bed to let them pass. There was a pretty village on the left bank, dominated by a picturesque castle; and whilst Jacob was pointing out the place to Patty, Mr. Maltby, who was standing in the bow of the barge, suddenly exclaimed, "Here they are at last, high and dry."

They both looked forward immediately, and beheld the long hulls of two of the barges apparently resting on a sandbank partially covered with water, whilst two other craft were afloat and moored to their anchors close by. The nearest barge was inclined lengthwise to the horizon, and her stern, being in deep water, had sunk nearly level with the surface, whilst her bow was altogether in the air. The second had a considerable list athwart, but was not injured in any way.

The empty boats were speedily anchored in the deep channel alongside the two which were aground, and Kershaw came on board to explain to Mr. Maltby, with much head scratching, how they had run on the sandbank.

"You see, Muster Maltby," he said, "when we went down stream the channel was clear just where the barge lies, and in coming up it wur shifted in close to the bank, and I sez to Ned, as we ran for the old coorse, Ned, I sez——"

"Never mind what you said now, Kershaw; the boats are aground, and we must get them off at once, if we can. Get all the dry sacks into this barge, and the

wet ones into the other; there's no help for spilt milk."

The men were now directed to unload the two barges which were aground, and to shift the flour into the empty boats which Mr. Maltby had brought down the river, and in an hour all the flour which could be got at over water had been transhipped, and one of the stranded barges floated off the sandbank, but Kershaw's boat still remained immovable and half full of water. As the river was falling rapidly, it was evident that an immediate effort should be made to get her off, or she would soon be on dry land, and probably could not then be moved until the river rose again in the winter floods. Therefore Mr. Maltby directed all the barges to drop astern and anchor in the stream behind the sunken boat. The new chain which had been lent by Hazelton was passed round the windlasses of three of the barges anchored in line, and then secured to the strong timber stanchions in the after-part of Kershaw's unlucky craft. In this way a powerful strain could be brought to bear on her, to draw her off the sandbank. The crab winch was sent on shore and secured to a tree, and a light chain carried from it to the stern of the sunken barge, so as to direct her obliquely off the bank into the channel; and lastly, two strong spars were secured as shear legs in an A-shape over the stern, to which heavy pulley blocks were attached, by means of which a lifting strain could be applied in addition to the other pulling appliances above described.

Mr. Maltby and Jacob were very busy with these

preparations, which occupied them over an hour, whilst Patty sat on the bank intently watching the arrangements. When all was ready, Mr. Maltby took his place in the bow of the barge nearest to the sunken one, and gave the signal to his men to "heave in" on the windlasses, which they did with much stamping and "Yo heave yo-ing." As the heavy chain was hauled in, the barges began to strain gradually on the anchors which held them fast, and in a little while the great chain became taut throughout, but still the stranded barge showed no sign of movement. Mr. Maltby now signalled to his men to haul on the tackles attached to the shear legs; the stern then rose slowly from its bed in the sand, at the same time the water rushed forward and filled the sleeping cabin in the bows. It was evident now that if the barge were hauled off into deep water she might immediately fill and sink unless the leak in the stern could be stopped.

Mr. Maltby now held a consultation with Kershaw, the result of which was that an old sail was lowered over the stern of the damaged boat, and gradually drawn beneath; the barge hanging from the two strong spars all the time. By this means the injured planking was covered, and the leak pretty well staunched.

Kershaw and Jacob now advised that she should be pumped out, but as the day was waning, Mr. Maltby unfortunately decided to make an effort to haul her off first, lest they should be detained at the place all night. The lifting tackle was therefore made fast, and the whole force of bargemen set to work on the three wind-

lasses, hauling down stream by means of the great chain, which soon gave audible evidence of the severity of the strain applied to it by emitting a sharp, jarring sound as link after link passed over the large iron sheave in the stern, from whence it ran to the windlass in the bow, which had been turned down the river. The chain was thus in a state of extreme tension from one end of the boat to the other at a height of about a foot from the deck, on which stood Mr. Maltby and Jacob Grimshaw. The latter touched Mr. Maltby on the shoulder and said, "This is not a very safe place for thee if the chain were to break." Mr. Maltby was looking anxiously at the sunken barge in front of them, and seemed not to hear. He had observed that the chain from the crab winch on shore was being strained severely, as the barge to which it was attached was slowly drawn astern off the bank by the windlasses, and it evidently required to be eased out.

"Jacob," he said, hurriedly, "go on shore and slack that tackle; it's pulling against us now as she is coming off."

Jacob stepped over the side at once and dropped into a little boat with which communication was maintained with the adjacent bank.

Mr. Maltby approached to give him a parting direction as he pushed off.

"Tell Patty," he said, "not to sit still by the river, as there is a damp mist rising."

Mr. Maltby could yet plainly see his daughter, who was intently watching the operations, and in the

midst of his work he considerably thought of her health.

As Jacob glanced up at him and nodded in reply, his quick ear detected an unusual grinding and snapping sound from the chain, on which the men were still prizing with all their might; suddenly there was a report like a cannon-shot, and something flashed in the air behind Mr. Maltby, who was flung headlong into the deep water as from a catapult.

The barges recoiled one from the other, and a great foaming wave swept over the spot where he had sunk, leaving the surface all white and seething in its track.

The unproved chain had snapped at one of the dangerous links referred to by Hazelton, and one of the free ends had struck Mr. Maltby a severe blow in the back in its recoil, as he stood looking over the side of the barge, and so hurled him into the water.

Jacob could not swim, but he could manage a boat skilfully, and as he turned the head of the little craft down stream with one powerful stroke, he heard a loud scream from Patty on the river bank behind him.

The next moment he caught sight of Mr. Maltby's upturned face floating past, as he lay on his back in the current with outstretched arms. In another instant Jacob had hold of him by the breast, but could not lift him out of the water.

The little boat now drifted past the third barge, and, on being perceived, three or four stout fellows sprang over the side into the river, and rose around their employer like so many water-dogs.

Their well-meant efforts were near resulting in the upsetting of the small boat, as they all seized on the gunwale next them, but at this crisis one of the men on deck flung a coil of rope over Jacob, which he grasped with one hand whilst he held Mr. Maltby with the other, and so they were all drawn under the stern.

Here the men in the water found they could stand on the bottom, and in a few moments they had lifted Mr. Maltby into the small boat, which was then rapidly pushed to the shore at a point where Patty was anxiously awaiting them.

Mr. Maltby's eyes were open, and he looked earnestly at his daughter as they approached her, but his features were contracted with pain, and he seemed to have great difficulty in speaking.

The men lifted him gently out of the boat and laid him on the bank, his head resting in his daughter's lap. One of the men brought some brandy in a horn cup, and he swallowed a little. He then spoke in a feeble voice to his daughter, "God be thanked, Patty, my life is spared, although I am severely hurt; let us go to Arley at once." Then he endeavoured to sit up, but fell back again suddenly, and the men knew at once he had been heavily struck on the spine by the chain, and was very seriously injured.

They soon formed a rude litter, and bore him slowly to the little village inn, Patty and Jacob walking sadly at either side of him, holding his clammy hands. He could not bear to be carried up the narrow stairs, and therefore a bed was extemporised for him on the ground-

floor, whilst Jacob scoured the country in search of a surgeon, who was not particularly pleased at being disturbed in the midst of a local dinner party.

However, he returned with the anxious young man to the inn, and hastily examined the patient. "He will be all right in a day or two," he said; "I shall send him something by-and-by;" and then he returned to his previous occupation.

Patty was delighted with the opinion which was so glibly offered by the medical gentleman; but Jacob was by no means satisfied, and Mr. Maltby remained silent for a long time.

When he spoke at length, it was with much effort, in a feeble voice, and young Grimshaw bent down his ear close to his employer's lips to learn his wishes.

"I shall never recover this, Jacob," he said; "take me home, and send for my wife."

Next morning they bore him back to Lauterdale in one of his own barges, lying on a mattress on the deck, watched over by his daughter, who never left his side, whilst Jacob travelled across the country with speed to break the sad intelligence to Mrs. Maltby, at Oxford, and to bring her home with him to Lauterdale.



CHAPTER XX.

TWILIGHT.

“But yet, with fortitude resign’d,
I’ll thank th’ inflictor of the blow ;
Forbid the sigh, compose my mind,
Nor let the gush of misery flow.
The gloomy mantle of the night,
Which on my sinking spirit steals,
Will vanish at the morning light,
Which God, my East, my Sun reveals.”

CHATTERTON.

MORE than a year had elapsed since the accident on the river to Mr. Maltby, who lay on a little couch in the porch of his cottage one fine evening, whilst the sinking sun lit up for a moment the distant summits of the Welsh hills, clearly visible from his doorway, kindling their rugged outlines into flame, soon to change rapidly to cold grey tints, and then to darkness. There was a breath of the coming autumn in the air, and now and then a rustling leaf whirled down the path to the wicket on which his eyes were fixed, as if expecting some one, whilst his lips repeated slowly the solemn words of the 39th Psalm. He looked for a moment at the falling shadows on the great hills, as he mur-

mured, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days what it is. I am consumed by the blow of thine hand; O, spare me that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more."

John Maltby had received his death-blow on the river from the unproved chain, although he still lingered on a bed of languishing, and those around him tried to speak cheerfully of his recovery, hoping against hope.

The Arley doctor had talked glibly of his "being all right in a few days," and Patty had blessed him in her beating heart for the cheering promise; but Doctor Dixon, at the Dale, had held out no such expectation from the first, and looked gravely into the eyes of his friend and patient, whose faint sad smile told him the look was well understood. Mrs. Maltby had immediately summoned the skilful man who had successfully attended her son at Oxford, and until he arrived, looked on the quiet local practitioner as a prophet of evil. But alas! out of the mouths of the two men came the same sentence—"It was but a question of time." There was complete paralysis of the lower limbs and spine, and the skill of the physicians could not avail to stay its stealthy progress upward.

Mr. Maltby knew this very well himself, before he heard it from the doctors; but to him death had no terrors, and all he desired to learn from them was, "How long it would be ere the end." "Perhaps a year; perhaps two years; no one could positively say;" and now he had entered on the second

doubtful period of his probation, and he felt that he would not live to see the roses bloom again in the garden.

During the period of his illness, many changes had happened in the circumstances of those with whom we have already made acquaintance in the Dale. Silas Clayton had knelt beside Mr. Maltby's couch, and prayed with him for the last time ere he took his departure for the mission station, whither he had volunteered to go immediately after his rejection by Patty. He knew well he should see his friend's face no more until they met "beyond the river;" and departed sorrowing, but "in sure and certain hope" of such a meeting.

Edward Maltby had taken his degree, and entered the Church, under the wing of the Vicar of Lawley, in whose parish he was to assist until he received a priest's ordination, and therefore he was often at Lauterdale during his father's illness.

Robert Field had entered as a student at Magdalene College, following his friend's example, and was there consolidating and refining the crude mass of information he had previously acquired.

He was already looked on with much favour by the dons, and encouraged by the approval of the good Vicar and of his friend Josiah Morris, who still hoped to bring about a reconciliation between father and son, and contrived that everything concerning the latter should be indirectly made known to Mr. Field, although the proud reserved old ironmaster would not admit

that the subject of his son's pursuits possessed any interest for him, and had forbidden all mention of his name.

Jacob Grimshaw had come out nobly, and was now the active manager of Mr. Maltby's business. It continued to thrive notwithstanding the continued absence of the principal. After the first few weeks of his illness, however, and for a long time subsequently, he was able to control his affairs with the assistance of the young man, who was zealously devoted to his employer's interests. Gradually young Grimshaw and Mrs. Maltby assumed the sole direction of the business, and the sick man only inquired in a general way as to the results. Worldly things were dropping away from him, and his long habits of order and method left but little to be arranged.

Mrs. Maltby had always taken a close interest in her husband's affairs, and now her knowledge stood her in good stead. At first she rather disliked and scarcely trusted young Jacob, as the son of the quarrelsome old miller, then in full swing with his great lawsuit, and also as one of the unconverted, who made no open profession of religion, although he regularly attended chapel. Added to this, there was a shrewd suspicion in the good woman's mind, that but for Jacob's presence at the cottage during her visit to Oxford, that suit of Silas Clayton's would not have been rejected by her daughter.

At length the persevering, steady attention of the young man won upon her so much, that ultimately

she came to look on him with a sort of motherly interest.

Now, all this time the mill was stopped, and old Grimshaw came seldom to the Dale, and when he did come was scarcely seen by any one outside his cottage door, inside which a long-suffering old woman endured his constant and wearisome grumblings, and prepared the simple meals he consumed in his grim solitary fashion. But one day came Patty, like little Red Ridinghood, and knocked at the miller's door. Blushing as she spoke nervously to the old man, who looked like an ogre, all unshorn and untidy, she said that her father particularly wished to see him, if he would be so good as to come to the cottage at the foot of the Dale that evening before sunset. To this he had muttered something like an assent, shading the light from his eyes with his hand, as he curiously looked out of his den at the comely maiden in the doorway, who tripped away as speedily as possible to resume her unwearied attendance at her father's side.

It was for the advent of this ogre of a miller that John Maltby looked so anxiously on the evening mentioned in the opening of this chapter.

The reader will wish to know how fared the fortunes of the miller's son with Patty during this twelve months, but there is little to relate. The sad disaster which had befallen Mr. Maltby had driven all lighter thoughts from the young girl's mind, and her assiduous attendance on her father, who was always in a recumbent posture, and often in much pain, precluded all love

passages between her and Jacob ; yet gradually it had come to be understood between them that some day or other they would be man and wife—if all went well ; but as the day appeared to them to be necessarily very distant, little was said on the subject beyond the unspoken language in Patty's eyes as she smiled a greeting to the young clerk when he came to render an account of his daily stewardship at the cottage in the evening. At present Jacob desired no more.

He had entered on his service, as his namesake entered into the service of Laban, in the hope of similar reward ; and under present circumstances he was content to abide the progress of events, cheered by the daily sight of his sweetheart at her post. At length it was evident the close confinement was banishing the roses from her cheeks, and then Mr. Maltby insisted that she should take some walking exercise each evening, attended by Jacob. Thus they were gradually recognised by the Dale folk as an engaged couple, though as yet no troth had been plighted between them. Mrs. Maltby quietly acquiesced in the arrangement, but all idea of his marriage with Patty was postponed, in her mind, whilst her husband lay there so helpless. She had not yet brought herself to entertain seriously the absolute conviction that the end was drawing nigh, hoping always that the summer would bring him round again. But now the summer was ended, and as each week passed away, it was observed that he moved with greater difficulty, and relinquished one by one such light tasks as he had set himself. At

first he read a great deal, having been always a reading man; now he listened only to the low sweet voice of Patty, and desired to hear her read one book alone, each line and word of which he could repeat by heart, although it still pleased him better to hear it read by his daughter, whilst he joined now and then in repeating some favourite passage aloud.

The leaders of the chapel came often to see him, and were courteously received; but as time wore on he seemed to shrink somewhat from strangers, and to turn his thoughts with more concentrated affection to those around him. On this account there was much head-shaking amongst these worthies as to his doubtful state of heart and sad spiritual condition.

One day, as Jacob left the room, having made his usual short business report, Mr. Maltby had suddenly taken his daughter's hand, and said—

“Patty, he is a great comfort and help, and a good youth—what do you think of him?”

Patty's pale cheek was suffused with red, and her eye brightened a little, but she had no other answer to give. Mr. Maltby continued—

“I should like to see thee settled, darling, before I die;” and then she hid her face in her hands, and wept bitterly.

A few days after, Mr. Maltby detained Jacob when he came as usual to see him, and gently drew from him the story of his love, and told him there would be no obstacle on the score of ways and means, but that “he wished to see them married before Christmas.”

When Patty came in, Mr. Maltby placed her hand in Jacob's, and blessed them both. For an instant she thought of that other proposal which had been made to her over twelve months since under such different circumstances, and then she allowed her soft little hand to rest in her lover's broad palm, as a token of assent; and after this her father had sent her on that errand to the old miller.

Old Grimshaw, although he certainly could call no man friend, was not so utterly destitute of acquaintances but that he had been informed of his son's probable marriage to the daughter of the well-to-do maltster; and had it not been for the total absorption of his mind in his lawsuit, he would have taken some natural interest in the affair. As it was, he felt merely a momentary curiosity to see what sort of damsel his son had chosen, and some slight pleasure in the fact that she was pretty and winning; but, on the whole, he considered that Jacob was too young, and preferred that the great dispute between himself and the Dale Company should be decided before any other mundane question was raised.

He had always respected and liked Mr. Maltby, and therefore he set out as he had half promised, with many grumblings and mutterings, through the Dale to the cottage at its foot.

Little boys and girls, the sons and daughters of the workmen, crept fearfully out of his path as he strode on, and then thrust out their tongues and made faces at his back. Once or twice he turned to look at the

busy water-wheels owned by the Company, and reflected with wrath on the stoppage of his own wheel, and the vow which prevented him from raising the sluices and setting it going again. But he comforted himself as best he could with the thought that the loss thereby occasioned was all going to accumulate the bill against his opponents, although, occasionally, some doubts as to the profitable result of Mr. Quetchett's proceedings would intrude themselves uncomfortably, and make him wish, at all events, that his vow had been unspoken, or that some way of evading it without breach of the strict letter would present itself to his mind. Suddenly he stopped, and struck his forehead with his open hand, as he remembered that he had sworn that "he would never raise the mill sluices *himself* until the great lawsuit was decided." A loophole cunningly presented itself—"They might be raised, and the mill put to work again by some one else—for instance, by Jacob."

He sat down on a low stone wall by the roadside, and munched his finger-nails in gloomy cogitation. Money was getting very scarce with him, and was now urgently required. Mr. Quetchett had been pressing very much of late for fresh supplies, and he knew not where to get them. His trade had vanished, and only a few bad debts remained outstanding on his books. After a long period of severe rumination, he struck his hand on his leg, and laughed a wild low laugh, and chucked his head cunningly sideways with a wink as he prepared to resume his journey, having discovered a way out of his difficulty, and a means of

outwitting himself in the matter of that oath about the sluices.

He now observed by the shadows that the evening was closing in, and examined a huge turnip-shaped watch, with many silver cases, which he drew from the depths of a fob pocket by a strong steel chain, and finding he was late, he strode on hurriedly to the interview with Mr. Maltby. The latter still lay waiting for him in the porch, feeling rather chill and cold, and in consequence was frequently urged by Patty to allow himself to be moved indoors.

As the old miller raised the latch of the little wicket and strode up the winding footpath, some feeling of awe came over him in the recollection that he was about to visit a man whose days were numbered. The probable result of the accident was no secret in the Dale; all men knew that Mr. Maltby's fate was sealed. Therefore the miller took off his hat, and approached the reclining figure on the couch with some reverence.

He started when he recognised the altered appearance of the active man he had known in health and vigour, and hurriedly sat him down by his side with his hat on the ground, saying as he did so, "I'se sorry, Muster Maltby, to see thee thus."

"Yes, Grimshaw," said the sufferer. "Sooner or later it must come to all of us—in the Lord's good time. I wished to see you about your son before I grow worse."

The miller nodded as if he understood, and smiled a grim wise smile.

"No doubt you are aware that he is desirous to marry my daughter; and it appears to me that we should both lay our heads together to help them. I am sorry you are still engaged in that lawsuit, and determined not to work the mill. Now, Mr. Grimshaw, I wish you would take a dying man's advice, and give it up."

"The lawsuit mun go on," said the miller; "but Jacob may start the mill if he can do so."

"Then will you make it over to him at a moderate rent?" said Mr. Maltby, raising himself a little on his elbow, the old spirit for driving a close bargain coming over him for an instant, despite his condition.

"I'll sell my interest in the lease," said the miller, mindful of the necessity to obtain funds for the insatiable maw of Mr. Quetchett.

Mr. Maltby reflected a little. It occurred to him that if any considerable sum of money were to be placed in the miller's hands it would go into the pockets of the lawyers, and then the old man would be thrown back on the young couple for support.

"I suppose you really want money?" he said suddenly.

The miller nodded assent, thrown for a moment off his guard.

"How much?"

The miller slowly rubbed his grizzled chin.

"I think," he said, "five 'undred pounds 'ud see us through, and then Jacob shall have half the mill and half the damages."

“Half the mill will be no use to Jacob without capital, or whilst your friend Quetchett can lay hands on the other half; and I fear the damages will be all your own,” said Mr. Maltby. “Mr. Grimshaw,” he continued, “I will start your son with three thousand pounds when he marries, if you will let him have the mill at a moderate rent. Mind—the mill on his own account altogether. Let us say that he shall pay you one hundred a year during your lifetime, which will enable you to live at ease in the cottage. We will build a nest for the young people close by. But, Grimshaw, my friend,” he added impressively, “let me beg of you once more to live in peace, and drop this dreadful litigation. You will regret it some day when you come to lie here.”

There was a momentary flash in the old miller’s eye at the mention of the three thousand pounds, but it faded out at the idea of surrendering the mill to his son and becoming an annuitant.

“I canna stop the lawsuit, Muster Maltby,” he said, “and I wunt. But I’ll think over the rest of your offer.”

Then he put on his hat and strode away. Mr. Maltby lay back wearily on his couch as Patty and her mother appeared, and carefully wheeled him into the house.

Old Grimshaw consumed the very stumps of his finger-nails as he sat thinking over the proposal all night, crouched over the embers of a coal fire, which went out altogether ere the dawn. He muttered and

growled to himself in the cold, and now and again extended his clenched hand in the darkness in the direction of the dwelling of his opponents, who he believed had driven him to this dire strait. With the morning's post came a fresh urgent application for money from Mr. Quetchett, who now saw his way, for the twentieth time, to victory. Then the old man went down and looked at the great water-wheel, on which moss and slime had formed, and afterwards he unbarred the door and went into the mill itself.

There was a scurry of rats along the floors of the building as he slowly entered, and heavy cobwebs full of strange insects fell on his hands and face as he ascended the worn stairs. There in the dim light he sat him down with a groan on a millstone, in bitterness of soul at sight of the desolation around him. He remained many hours, thinking—thinking. The rats soon assumed courage on seeing his inaction, and peered out of their holes at him ; then one or two of the boldest ventured abroad in the hope that he had brought something eatable into the premises, as by this time they had consumed every particle of corn, and even devoured the leather driving-bands of the machinery.

The results of his litigation were now palpably before him, for the first time, in the ruin and desolation of the premises ; yet his heart grew harder than the stone on which he sat, and whenever he turned him to the quarter of the compass where dwelt his supposed enemies, his bloodshot eyes flashed out with evil

malignity. Could he but lay his hands at this moment on the necks of those two men in the Dale House, he would strangle them both in one grasp. Then he struck his clenched fist on the millstone, and wounded it severely, as he exclaimed, "Darn their souls, let the mill go! I'll never give in whilst there's law to be had in England."

It was now mid-day, and as yet he had tasted no food. He crept downstairs again, and groped his way to the office, where the dust was nearly an inch thick over everything. He routed out the stump of a pen which the mice had despised, and uncorked an ink-bottle, and with these materials he managed to scrawl on a scrap of paper—

"Mr. Maltby, I'll take the hundred a year, with five hundred pounds paid down; but no less.

"Yours,

"JACOB GRIMSHAW, Senr."

This missive he despatched by his old servant, who had just come to look for him, fearing he had made away with himself.

He then returned to his solitary cottage, and went groaning to bed.

Mr. Maltby did not like the idea of supplying fuel to the fires fanned by lawyer Quetchett. On the other hand, time was of consequence, and he knew the obdurate character of the man he had to deal with. Therefore, he accepted the miller's proposal immediately,

and gave the necessary instructions to his solicitor to carry it into effect.

There was some little trouble with the old man in details, but Mr. Quetchett's demands were imperative, and he was driven thereby to sign the necessary documents transferring the mill to his son, who immediately set about placing the concern in thorough repair with funds supplied by Mr. Maltby.

He also commenced the erection of the house to which we have already been introduced, and one bright morning in October a little knot of friends entered the church at Lawley, and there Patty and Jacob were united by the good Vicar, the little bride being given away by her brother.

At that time marriages could not be celebrated in Dissenting chapels, and therefore they were married by special license at Lawley.

It was the quietest of all quiet weddings. Every one remembered him who lay so stricken at Lauterdale, whose wish it was that this ceremony should take place whilst he was still living; and after the wedding they all returned to the cottage, where Patty immediately resumed her old place by her father's side.

One of Mr. Maltby's dearest wishes was now satisfied, and he seemed to be more at rest.

Once he was taken to see the new cottage in progress, the plans of which Jacob had submitted to him, and he smiled as he saw the great mill-wheel in motion once more, and heard the whirr of wheels within.

It was the last concern of this lower troubled sphere in which he exhibited any interest. A few weeks after, he passed away so quietly that no one of those present could say when he had ceased to breathe, his eyes still fixed on the Book whose words had been a lamp unto his feet.

They bore him to his last resting-place at Lawley, where he wished to be buried, followed by a great concourse of the Dale folk—the Company's works being closed for the day as a mark of respect seldom before exhibited.

The river-side fraternity flocked mournfully behind the rest, sorrowing over the best master they had ever known, whose hand was always open to relieve distress, and who dealt liberally with all who served him; and if many of them sought to drown their grief in strong drink ere evening, it must be admitted that for once in their lives there were extenuating circumstances.

As the long funeral procession passed the gates of the Dale House, it was observed that both the brothers Field had joined in the rear, walking arm in arm with uncovered heads, which, when it was told to Mrs. Maltby, comforted her much, as evidence of the great respect in which her husband was held, being, in fact, the only instance of the kind on record.

The business by the river-side was bequeathed to her, together with the cottage and ten thousand pounds. A like sum was inherited by Edward Maltby, and in addition to the money already paid to Jacob on his marriage, as capital wherewith to work the mill, Mr.

Maltby had also provided for the erection and furnishing of the young miller's house, and for the annuity to be paid to the old man, who did not live long to enjoy it, but died of a broken heart, in consequence of the absolute abandonment of proceedings for want of funds, bequeathing nothing but evil counsel to his son on his death-bed, to bear fruit later on.

Of the early married life of the young miller I have little of interest to narrate beyond what has already been told. He was industrious, frugal, and blessed with good health and a good wife, whom he loved tenderly, and who was much esteemed by all who knew her.

Shortly after Mr. Maltby's death they removed to the new cottage, and there was born unto them the son who was subsequently articed to old lawyer Quetchett, and the little daughter who took the half-drowned child into her bed on the night of Mr. Forster's arrival in Lauterdale.

It is with this SECOND GENERATION that we shall have most to do in the remainder of this story, working out the history of their lives as affected by the lives of those who went before them.



CHAPTER XXI.

CLOSING IN.

“And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill ;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.

“Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea !
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.”

TENNYSON.

VERY successful men, as distinguished from very happy men, are generally found to have one great object before them in life, to the attainment of which all their energies are directed, whether it be wealth or power or pre-eminence. Other things follow after a fashion as matters of course, such as love, marriage, and the accidents of existence generally, but these are usually subordinate to the dominant idea, and, as such, are more or less unsatisfactory, unless they accidentally become strong enough in themselves to divert attention from the original pursuit for a time.

Edward Maltby and his friend Robert Field had started in life with great objects in view. The former

meant, if he could, to rise in the church to high honour and dignity, and to that end he had studied hard and ordered his ways in strict accordance with the examples of rising men of his time.

He was a man much respected by those who were his elders, and but little loved by the juniors of his acquaintance. Cold and reserved in temperament, and cautious to a fault, but possessed of a clear and subtle intellect, he was known as a sound scholar, whose acquirements had been severely tested during his career at Oxford.

His severe illness and subsequent residence in the abode of Dora Clayton had done something in the way of breaking down the philosophic barriers he took pride in erecting as fences around his heart and mind. He learned then, for the first time, that pure religion was not a thing of schools or sects, and cast off much of his strong prejudice against the Dissenters, amongst whom he had been brought up; and although his allegiance to the Church of England was unshaken, his personal ambition was greatly modified. Then came the genial warmth of a great friendship for Robert Field, all the sweeter because of associations with the family at Lawley.

It was fortunate for the young men that they had not fallen in love with the same lady; and perhaps still more fortunate that the two they had chosen were of different temperaments, suited so well to the peculiar characteristics of their respective admirers. The elder daughter of the Vicar admired scholarship above all

things, and valued intellect, with which she was herself richly endowed, beyond all other gifts. The younger and more enthusiastic girl revered most the men who became heroes, and were ready to lay down their lives for some great cause, although she hoped her particular hero would contrive to preserve his.

Then had happened the dreadful accident to Mr. Maltby, and his lingering illness and death, during the residence of his son at Lawley, when the still depths of the young man's heart were stirred, and the idols he had set up melted away, and with them the great idea with which he had set out in his career. He was no longer the embryo of the cold ambitious ecclesiastic, but became a type of the educated and zealous parish clergyman, trained in the best school for his work, and subject to the most favourable influences in the example of the Vicar.

Occasionally his natural temperament would appear, and mar for a little the general harmony of his character ; still, such as he was, he had won the heart of Martha Fletcher, who believed him to be perfect.

He was now placed in possession of sufficient means, and there was no longer any obstacle to their marriage after his ordination, when the days of his mourning were ended. He particularly desired that his solitary friend Robert Field, then steadily pursuing his college course, should be present at his wedding ; and, consequently, the latter was invited by the Vicar to visit Lawley once more.

Two years had elapsed since the young man had left

his father's house. During this time he had remained constant to his love for Rachel, although he had not been permitted to see or correspond with her. Whether such prohibition was wise or proper is not the question here. Mr. Fletcher conscientiously adhered to his resolution, believing that by so doing he was best serving the interests of the young man, and anxious to close, if possible, the breach between him and his father. As yet, however, the old man had shown no sign of relenting, and it was believed by some that he wished to ignore the fact of his son's existence altogether. Now, this was incorrect and unjust. Mr. Field was persuaded by his brother to require absolute submission in all things, and an admission of past errors from his son. The son, on the other hand, would no longer submit to such control in his private life, and denied that there had been any fault on his part. No doubt the balance of right lay with him. It is true he made no effort to meet his father halfway towards a reconciliation, whilst the latter waited in the hope of such effort being made, and probably, if left to himself, would have taken the initiative. Unfortunately, his brother's strongly expressed opinions on the subject, appealing as they did to his pride, turned the scale against the young man, and fomented the anger of the old ironmaster.

Those who have mixed with the older families of Friends in England, amongst whom such strict patriarchal ideas were frequently held, will quite understand the nature of this strange quarrel; but to

others its character will probably appear unnatural. Joshua Field also hoped and expected that some application would have been made to him for money, either directly or indirectly, by his son ; but the private liberality of Josiah Morris had obviated the necessity for his doing so. This was in itself a fresh offence. The old man knew very well that the student had no private resources of his own, and, being unaware of the funds supplied by the cashier, he believed that his son was indebted to strangers for his college expenses and the means of support, and wrongly suspected that the Vicar supplied both. This was very galling to his proud spirit, and a deep aggravation of the imaginary wrongs he was enduring at the hands of both. The fact that his son had entered a college at all was to him evidence that the young man would ultimately endeavour to maintain himself independently in some profession ; and to men like the Fields, who were very rich, this was a bitter humiliation.

The elder brother made some effort to obviate this part of his punishment, and directed Josiah Morris to remit such sums as he deemed requisite for the outcast, without any reference to him as to the amount, or any mention of his name.

Josiah endeavoured to carry out this rather ungracious provision, which relieved him from personal advances, although he would have willingly placed his last shilling at the young man's disposal ; but the impression left on Robert Field's mind by the correspondence which ensued on this matter was unfortunately

this—that it was a kind pretence on the part of the cashier to relieve him from any feeling of obligation. Therefore, he was more careful than before in availing himself of the funds placed at his command, and for a graduate at Oxford his expenses were moderate indeed.

He would have accepted a reasonable allowance from his father as a matter of just right, had it been directly offered to him, and he felt the absence of such offer as a cruel wrong and an injustice.

There was thus rising up between them a wall of misunderstanding cemented with bitterness, which a word from either would have shattered into dust; but no such word ever came to be spoken.

In due time Robert Field completed his college course, and took his degree with credit, and then he followed his friend's footsteps into the service of the Church, having before him also the hope that in so doing he would win the hand, as he had already won the heart, of Rachel Fletcher.

He had visited Lawley, and seen her once more on the occasion of Edward Maltby's marriage.

A moderate college living in a rich eastern county had recently been offered to the latter, and to it he had taken his young wife. We shall see them again nearer home by-and-by.

It was during this visit that Robert Field finally decided to enter the Church, and ultimately he took his friend's place in assisting Mr. Fletcher, whose active powers were somewhat impaired by time and incessant work.

It had cost the Vicar some mental struggle before he consented to this arrangement, and he had essayed again to see Mr. Field, but, unhappily, no audience was vouchsafed to him by the stern ironmaster, who was then in the climax of his wrath.

Thus thrown back on his own judgment for counsel, and urged by his son-in-law and by his eldest daughter ; feeling also his own increasing infirmities, and the absolute necessity for assistance in his parish, he had reluctantly consented—first, to receive the young man as his curate, and ultimately as his daughter's husband ; to fill for a time, at least, the place of the son who had gone to India, of whose return there was at that time but little prospect.

He hoped that his youngest and best beloved child would in this way be retained near him for the remainder of his days, and so he bestowed her as his best gift on the heir to the Dale property—albeit at that time poor enough—and felt some pride in the thought that no one could say he was marrying his child to a rich man for the sake of wealth.

Robert Field had deserved and had fairly won the reward of his faithful love, and valued the rich prize that had fallen to him in his sweet wife far above all the wealth and position he had laid down to win her.

They had no home but the vicarage, and there, in the course of years, was born to them a son and a daughter ; the latter being the lovely child whom we have seen for a moment in the library of the Dale House when this story opened. The years spent peacefully and usefully

at Lawley by the young couple were years of unalloyed happiness. The old Vicar's youth seemed to be renewed by the advent of the two grandchildren, who played around his knees and made constant melody in the house with their young fresh voices, whilst his strength and energy were no longer taxed by wearisome journeys to distant parts of his parish, now undertaken by his zealous, active curate, who was looked on as something more than an ordinary mortal by the parishioners, who could never forget that only a few miles away lay vast works and property of which he might have been the ruler, had he not chosen to cast in his lot with them at Lawley.

There were some, however, who thought his conduct was utterly Quixotic, and who prophesied that sooner or later, when the fancy had forsaken him, he would return to the Dale House, or resume his proper position in some way.

Speculation was rife amongst these folk as to how a Church of England clergyman could lay aside his office and assume the management of a great business. They concluded it could be done somehow, and no doubt would be done some day. Now, it was the belief that no such change could be made which wounded the curate's father and uncle to the quick. Other professions might have been adopted and laid down, but they knew that those who became priests in the Church of England were never surrendered again to secular uses, and with "the laying on of hands" the old iron-master's heart was wrung to its core.

He would have given much of his wealth to prevent the imposition, or to undo the past years of estrangement; now he concluded that he was powerless to recover the lost prodigal, who certainly had not wasted his substance, but absolutely despised it.

Once only they met on the highway—the father, as usual, well mounted; the son on foot, trudging cheerfully on the dusty road. Then the old man turned away his proud head, and passed by on the other side; and so they never came to be reconciled, although there was absolutely no real quarrel, and no just cause of anger on either side.

It must not be imagined that no efforts were made to terminate this unnatural severance, or that the existence of such a painful state of things did not cause some anxiety to the young clergyman himself. He knew well enough that his position as a peacemaker and healer of feuds in the parish was weakened by the apparent existence of a family feud in his own case, and he had honestly endeavoured more than once to put an end to it through the intervention of his faithful friend, Josiah Morris.

There is no doubt that the unceasing efforts of the latter might have been successful had it not been for the counteracting influence of Jediah Field, whose evil star was then particularly in the ascendant. It was not that he bore any ill-will to his nephew,—on the contrary, he really loved him after a fashion, and meant everything he did for his ultimate benefit, with the special view to his restoration, if possible, to his proper place as heir

to the Dale property, and head of the great house. But so long as the young man abode in the tent of his enemy, and consorted with him, he used every means in his power, and unfortunately with success, to thwart any attempt at intervention on the part of others, and laid down such terms as absolutely necessary to be complied with by the son, before he approached the father, as rendered all such approach impossible without the sacrifice of self-respect.

Long after, when death had closed the door of hope for ever, Joshua Field remembered who it was that hindered the reconciliation for which he had longed, and added fuel to the fierce pride that preyed upon his heart.

Robert Field had now to all outward appearance settled down to his work, and apparently abandoned the visionary projects with which he set out so early in life. The constant occupation of his mind in his duties, and the necessity for performing them steadily, in order to relieve his father-in-law, whose health was feeble, seemed to leave no room for the wider schemes he had originally embraced. Yet these projects were still very dear to him, and he invariably evinced intense interest in their progress. For the present, he did the work he had found ready to his hand, hoping sooner or later to be permitted to take part in something greater, and an opportunity presented itself in the course of time.

Mr. Fletcher's son suddenly returned to England in broken health, but with unbroken spirit, and rested from his labours for a little space at Lawley. He

had been engaged in a great work in India, but was compelled to leave it in order to repair the inroads of the climate on his constitution, and would not be permitted to return there for several years. The enthusiasm with which he always spoke of the Missionary work roused the old spirit in the young curate, and set him dreaming again, as in former days, of great victories to be won over error and the powers of darkness abroad.

Then came the opportunity to see the distant battlefield, and to join in the warfare for a short time. A little band of good and brave men was about to proceed to America, to lift up their voices and cry aloud through the length and breadth of the land against the Slave Trade, which had apparently taken fresh root in the Southern States at a time when it was being trampled out elsewhere.

Geoffrey Fletcher was invited to join them, and was desirous to do so; but his physicians forbade it, and his father begged him to remain a few years at Lawley, feeling that but a short time remained in which they might be together. In this dilemma Robert Field was tempted to volunteer his services, seeing that the Vicar's son could fill his place at home during his absence, and fired with zeal in the greatest cause ever undertaken by the philanthropists. His offer was gladly accepted, and, with a vague sense of coming ill, he braced himself to the task of parting from his young wife and children. He desired to see his father before his departure, and journeyed once more on foot to the Dale House, in the

hope of terminating the estrangement between them by a personal interview.

Unfortunately Mr. Field, who rarely left the Dale, was absent from home for a few days, attending the annual gathering of the Friends at Manchester; and as the steam-vessel in which his son's passage from Liverpool had been taken sailed almost immediately, the two estranged men did not meet, and were destined never to see one another again in this life.

The great steamer sailed, with the earnest little band of pioneers of liberty on board,

“Out into the West when the sun went down;”

but of her fate no man knoweth anything to this day. News reached England from homeward-bound vessels of her rapid progress through the great waters—news which was read everywhere with interest, as steam passages to America were then in their infancy, and this large vessel was deemed one of the fastest of the new line. Then there was a long interval of silence, and people looked in vain in shipping reports for tidings, and in time for news of her arrival out; but no tidings came.

Who can tell what was endured by that young wife for many weary months, during which some hope still existed that intelligence might come of the missing vessel, until hope died out and sank into the aching dulness of despair?

There was one other suffering human being not far off, whose heart was torn daily on the rack of expecta-

tion ; who grasped each morning at every scrap of news or surmise that might tend to throw light on the position of the missing vessel, with whose fate was bound up that of his only son, and who tossed night after night on a sleepless pillow, longing for the morning, which might bring healing on its wings with some message from the deep. But no trace or sign, no plank or waif, nor shred of garment has ever reached the shore. Until the great day when the sea shall give up its dead, the fate of the missing steamer must remain a mystery.

One day there came to the vicarage an old man with grey hair, who had walked on foot by the dusty highway from the Dale House, with bowed head and trembling knees, and had knelt, and wept, and prayed that his great sin might be forgiven—by the roadside, on the spot where a few months since he had turned his head and spurred his horse from the presence of the son whom to see once more in life he would gladly have laid down his great wealth, and with it his own existence.

Nemesis had come to sit where love had been cast out.

He had never before seen his son's wife or his son's children. He had at one time steeled his heart to think that their existence was to him a matter of indifference ; and, God forgive him ! he had thought only of the Vicar's daughter as of some light leman who had lured away the hope and pride of his house to destruction. Now he recognised the majesty of her

beauty as he stood before her in awe, whilst she strove to control the intensity of her grief, holding in either hand her fatherless children, who knew not yet the magnitude of their loss.

This, then, was the woman for whom his son had left home, kindred, and fortune behind him; to win whose hand he had worked all these years, first as a patient student, and then as a lowly curate near his father's door; whose short, useful life at Lawley that father had once looked on as a degradation to the family. But now, as the old man stood before the prize which had been won in this fair creature, there fell, as it were, scales from his eyes. He saw that his son had wisely chosen, and felt in his own heart that, were he but young again, he would have done the same.

There was a long pause as they stood there in the quiet room, whilst she wondered what could have brought this troubled man to her house, who as yet seemed dumb in her presence. Then his eyes fell from her face to her children, and stretching out his great arms as if to embrace her and them together, he groaned and cried aloud, "Rachel, Rachel, my daughter, forgive me for his sake!" and sank down at her feet.



CHAPTER XXII.

MUDDING THE POOL.

“Then they clung about
The old man’s neck, and kiss’d him many times ;
And all the man was broken with remorse,
And all his love came back a hundred-fold.”

TENNYSON.

THERE comes before me yet one other scene in this sad story. When the young widow left the vicarage, and entered the great house with Mr. Field, she was still further bereft. The good Vicar had passed away one summer evening in his chair, as if in sleep, full of years and honour, and his son Geoffrey, who had grown strong again, and was about to be married, held the living, and trod in his father’s footsteps.

There had been much entreaty on the part of her father-in-law before Rachel consented to remove from Lawley to live in the Dale House with her little ones. He had won his way to her heart by the depth of his grief for her husband and by his intense love for the children ; and she knew that her son’s place was, after all, by rights, in the cradle of the race at the Dale. She

wished also to make room at the vicarage for Geoffrey's intended wife, who was a stranger to her; and then the Dale House was not so very far from her father's and mother's last resting-place, as compared with the home of her sister Martha, to which she had been urgently invited. So at last with many tears she consented to the removal, and now, clad in deep mourning, she leans on the old man's arm, and clings more closely to him as she shrinks nervously from Jediah, who stands in the great hall to bid her formal welcome, and indeed is anxious to be as agreeable as possible, but is somewhat disturbed by the gentle reproach of those sad blue eyes, knowing well in his heart that he has wrongfully caused her and hers some suffering.

After this there was a chance of much happiness for Rachel. Nothing which could be thought of to conduce to her comfort was spared by Mr. Field, who almost gave up all business for a time in his anxiety to make the new home cheerful for her and the little ones, to whom he was passionately devoted—his special favourite being the boy, who was strikingly like his own lost son. The best rooms in one wing of the house were apportioned to her use, and even the staid sister Rebecca became active in her efforts to make Rachel comfortable, and began to love the gentle stranger very much after her quaint fashion. Jediah also did his best to atone for past misconduct, and adopted the little girl as his especial *protégée*.

There would have been great peace in store for them all had this pleasant state of things continued;

but it was ordained that Joshua Field should yet experience still lower depths of suffering, and so fill up the bitter cup of his punishment. He was intensely fond of the boy, who was a bright, interesting child, and he retained him in his presence whenever he could. His anxiety to protect him from every form of disease was immense, as if he had some presentiment that his treasure would be snatched away from him. Then there came a hot season, in which there was much sickness in the Dale, especially in the workmen's cottages near the great pool below the mill, through which flowed the river Lauter to drive the wheels and machinery in the works, and into which much of the house drainage of the district was discharged.

Now, as the Company's water-wheels were stopped at night and on Sundays, and as water was generally scarce in the summer-time, the sluices were closed and the river impounded for twelve hours out of the twenty-four, and for a longer period at the end of each week. In this way considerable deposits of mud were formed in the flat bed of the reservoir, which it became necessary to remove when the accumulation became very great. This operation had always been carried out hitherto when the river was very low, in one of the summer months.

There was an agreement between the Company and the miller that the mud should be removed at fixed intervals, as otherwise it would so accumulate as to impede the flow of the stream from the mill-wheel, thereby impairing its power.

The elder Grimshaw had succeeded so far in his lawsuit, that he had made this "mudding of the pool" a compulsory matter on the Dale Company, and his son was equally determined to stand upon his rights.

The latter had not as yet attempted to revive the litigation which had ruined his father, but he had written a formal letter to the brothers, requiring the immediate fulfilment of the covenant, the time for its performance having elapsed.

Joshua Field was at this time as happy as he could ever expect to be again in this life. He loved his gentle daughter-in-law very much, and almost adored the children. He had found a new zest in life in their society. He was therefore anxious that there should be no *contretemps* to his happiness in a renewal of the old quarrel, the memory of which was still green and unpleasant, as was also the bottom of the pool whenever exposed by the withdrawal of the water from its surface.

The mud which had to be removed was for the most part accumulated sewage, and as such, when festering under a hot sun, gave off most offensive odours, and was dangerous to health. On the last occasion of its exposure there had been a violent epidemic in the neighbourhood, and many of the children in the cottages had died; and even when the water flowed back again in its natural course, covering over the plague-place from the sun's rays, a kind of low intermittent fever hung about the neighbourhood for a time, and wasted the strength of the workmen.

This had occurred about seven years since, and now the danger was almost forgotten; but when it was announced that the pool was to be emptied again in consequence of a threat from the miller, one of the old hands who lived near the place, and had lost some of his children on the former occasion, shook his head ominously as he looked up, blinking like an owl in the hot sun, and said—

“Happen there ’ull be lots o’ work for Doctor Dixon when t’ mud is shifted out o’ Dale. Seems as how Miller Grimshaw ’ull gang his feyther’s gait. Barm’d, if I was Musters Field, I’d see him up t’ his neck in’t afore I’d stir a pund out till t’ winter.”

“Right enow, lad,” said a little crooked man, who had discussed the merits of the case with one of the miller’s men who was supposed to know something of the origin of the dispute; “but, ye see, Dale Company should ha’ done it last year accordin’ to ’greement, and not ha’ waited ’till t’ last moment in middle o’ summer. Law is law all t’ warld over, even for Quakers. Not that I think Jacob Grimshaw ’ud insist on the strict lines o’ th’ bargain, if Muster Jediah ’ud only spake ’im fair.”

Now this was strictly correct. Jacob Grimshaw was not then so far committed to carry out the behests of his dead parent, or so fond of quarrelling, but that a soft answer would have turned away his wrath; and if his missive had been delivered in the course of business to Mr. Joshua Field, probably the soft answer might have been forthcoming, as at that time the

senior partner was in a very amiable frame of mind, and especially anxious to live peaceably with all men, in order that he might make the most of his newly-found happiness during the few years that remained to him. Jediah returned a curt reply, to the effect that Jacob Grimshaw should have the strict letter of his bond, and ordered the water to be run out of the Dale Pool on the following Saturday evening, so that the "mudding," which generally lasted four or five weeks, might commence on the next Monday morning.

Strictly speaking, the order should have been given by his brother, being a matter connected with the external executive, which was the department of Joshua, and involving the stoppage of a portion of the works for a time, during the construction of a temporary watercourse round the margin of the pool.

Of late Joshua Field had tacitly allowed Jediah to take on himself many duties which were not within his strict province, any interference with which he would have previously resented. Indeed, Jediah had done so at first as a matter of necessity, during the period in which his brother's mind was distracted by suspense as to his son's fate, and subsequently he continued so to act when the old man occupied so much of his time with his newly-found treasures. Jediah was glad to see the reaction, and willing to make some sacrifice of his own time and pleasures to increase those of his brother; at the same time he liked to play first fiddle when he could, and always felt that he had hitherto had too much of the second instrument.

Therefore he gave the order about the pool on receipt of the miller's letter, without reflecting that before doing so he should have consulted Joshua; and in consequence of the order, a number of the men were thrown out of work, and ordered "to play" for a week—in other words, to remain idle until the wheels resumed work.

Now, Joshua Field especially hated "play" and holidays of every kind, and looked on enforced idleness such as this, as the worst of bad management. Therefore he always disliked the "mudding of the pool," and had postponed the evil day when it should be done to the last moment. He imagined that the old miller's son had forgotten all about it, and was totally unaware of the formal notice, or that the order had been issued by Jediah. He had previously determined that if such notice were received, he would postpone the work to a cold season, either with or without the miller's consent, well remembering the former sickness; and in the sequel it certainly was very unfortunate that he had not been consulted.

At this period there was no church in Lauterdale. Jediah Field had steadfastly set his face against granting a site for the erection of any building wherein his quondam foes might celebrate what he termed "their idolatrous rites" under his very nose, and he had carried his brother with him in refusing several applications for land, of which they held every available acre in fee. This was felt to be a hardship amongst church-going people in the Dale, and more

especially amongst the Company's workmen, many of whom had gone the round of every form of Dissent, and longed for rest in the formularies of the Established Church, where their right of private judgment, and the consequent troubles it had brought them into, would be somewhat limited. It was a special grievance to these people, inasmuch as each restless swarm which emerged from the chapel hives readily received grants of land from the brothers whereon to erect some hideous tabernacle for their own special variety of worship. Those who would go to church were therefore compelled to go up to Lawley, where they crowded the aisles and sat in the very windows for want of room, or else they wandered down to Severnbridge, where the clergyman was rather given to genuflexions and crosses even in that day of feeble things.

Rachel Field had gone to "Meeting" with the family on the first Sunday of her residence in the great house, wishing to please in all things, and had sat in solemn silence with the others during the allotted time.

Her sad aspect in her deep mourning had apparently acted as a spell on the tongues of those members of the Society who were usually pretty safe to be moved by the spirit at some period during the meeting, as on this occasion there was a dismal silence, broken only by occasional deep sighs from some of the elderly female "Friends," who remembered they had amongst them that day, as an example to be shunned, the veritable daughter of Heth who had led away Robert Field.

Towards the close of this edifying performance a brother had shot up suddenly in a corner of the room, and startled Rachel with the shrill enunciation of a truism to the effect that "truth was truth, and no one could deny it," after which the assembly broke up, and she returned to her own apartments, there to contrast this strange kind of worship with that which she had hitherto enjoyed.

Then she made up her mind to ask a special favour of her father-in-law, and prayed that his heart might be moved to grant it. She knew well that if she were to ask him to do some great thing, even to the half of his kingdom in the Dale, he would give it her; but she feared greatly that he would refuse this very little thing, and hesitated until the last day of the week to prefer her request.

In the evening, as he blessed and kissed the children ere they were taken away to the nursery, whither she always accompanied them, returning again to his side when she had seen them safely at rest, she turned from the door, and brought them back again to his knees, one in each hand, saying for them—for she feared to ask for herself—

"Grandpapa, may we go to Lawley to papa's church to-morrow?"

Old Joshua Field started, as if stung by some sudden remorse, and exclaimed hurriedly—

"Of course, Rachel—yes, darlings—of course!—to-morrow, and every Sunday as long as you please."

Then she kissed him on the forehead, and the chil-

dren hugged his knees, and were blessed and kissed over again with tears.

Truly, Rachel was beginning to understand what manner of man her father-in-law was, and to love him for his own sake, as well as for the sake of him whom they both loved.

Next morning the best carriage drew up at the door of the Dale House, to convey them to Lawley in time for the morning service.

Within the memory of the oldest servant, no one had ever seen a horse harnessed in the Dale stables before on first day, and there had been some inward struggles of conscience on the part of the stiff Quaker coachman before he ascended the driving-seat. But his master's orders were imperative, and he knew his yea was yea, and his nay nay, beyond question or argument; therefore, he gathered up the reins with an unmoved countenance, hoping this particular sin would not be laid to his charge. His astonishment was increased when, after Mr. Field had handed in his daughter-in-law, and placed the children beside her, he saw his master enter the vehicle himself, and leave the Friends' Meeting House behind him on the road to Lawley.

Rachel had ventured to say that "he need not come," but he had only smiled, and taken her hand in his, and held it all the way. When they reached the church porch, he drew it gently within his arm, and walked with bowed head by her side to the Vicar's pew, and there sat down with her and her children

under the pulpit from which his son had so often preached.

Thus Joshua Field endeavoured to atone for his great fault, and to trample on his pride and prejudice in the sight of all men.

From that day forth he went with Rachel every Sunday to the church at Lawley, and entered the Friends' Meeting no more, although he still used their form of speech. It was a grief and a trouble to the Society, and they now looked on "the daughter of Heth" as a very dangerous person. "Had she not led away the son, and now captivated the father?" But none of them dared open their lips in remonstrance, as they had previously done in the son's case.

Jediah was sore vexed at heart, but kept silence even from good words, and Rebecca Field retired more than before into the privacy of her own apartments, where she spent the weary hours in wool-work and meditation.

Rachel had yet one thing more to ask for, but she waited a little longer, hoping it would some day be bestowed as a free gift, and fearing also to cause any further division in the family by broaching the subject. She mourned to see the people trudging those weary miles on foot to and from Lawley on Sundays, whilst she was carried thither so luxuriously in her chariot.

Now the grievance of the Church people in the Dale with reference to the land which they had been refused

began to revive as they saw the carriage flash past them, and some of them were already looking to Rachel for deliverance, even as the Jews looked to Queen Esther.

The road from the Dale House to Lawley led round the Dale Pool, and one Sunday morning, as the carriage proceeded across the bridge over the Lauter, from which the miniature lake could be seen shining like a steel mirror in the sun, the occupants observed an unusual spectacle. The coachman pulled up involuntarily, and Mr. Field beheld, with some astonishment, that the water was nearly all gone. Great ugly banks of black mud were now visible, amidst which the little river wound its way in a narrow tortuous channel, and rushed roaring through the waste sluices in the dam. A great number of boys and young workmen had betaken themselves to the mud banks, some in flat-bottomed boats, others on rafts extemporised from kitchen-tables, old doors and planks, a few in washing-tubs and brewing vessels, but the great majority, bereft of their nether garments, were floundering about up to their knees in the sticky compound as best they could. Most of them were armed with sticks, furnished with every variety of spear-head, and with these they were pursuing, stabbing, and capturing the eels, jacks, and other coarse fish which sought refuge in the shallow pools left by the retreating waters.

The "mudding of the pool" had from time immemorial been a great event for the urchins of the Dale, and as soon as it was known that the waste sluices were

up, great preparations were made for the capture and destruction of the fish about to be deprived of their natural element.

How these fish contrived to exist in such turbid water was a matter for speculation ; but it must only be surmised that they were used to it from their earliest infancy, and so became impervious to the poisonous stuff in which they swam. At all events, they were known to be there in great numbers, and they evidently did their best to escape from their tormentors, the eels being especially fortunate in concealing themselves in the thick slimy ooze, from whence, alas for them ! in a few days they would be dug out by the excavators.

There was at this moment great screaming and shouting, and spearing, and much stirring up of the black mud, and splashing in the water.

Mr. Field looked in amazement at the riotous assembly. "What is this about ?" he said to a workman who was leaning over the parapet. "Who gave orders to let the water out ?"

The man touched his hat respectfully, and answered, "Please, sir, they be going to mud t' pool."

"Who gave the order ?"

"Well, I don't zactly know, master, 'bout the order, but folks say as how Miller Grimshaw hev wrote to Muster Jediah, and so the bottom sluices is took up since last night, and t' pool 'ull be dry afore sun-down."

"Drive on," said Mr. Field, knitting his brows together with a vexed look.

They returned from church by the same road, and found a great number of men assembled on the bridge, watching the capture of the fish.

The sun was now high in the heavens, and the mud had been well stirred up by the boys; a sickening stench pervaded the air, and a yellow ascending vapour was visible in the sun's rays. The coachman was compelled to stop this time, as the men were so intent on the unusual spectacle that they forgot to make way for the carriage.

There was a deep pool beneath the bridge, in which the largest of the fish had taken refuge, and from whence they were being drawn out by vessels lowered over the parapet. A huge pike had just been captured and thrown on the footway, where he was snapping and biting at all around him. Mr. Field pointed out the voracious fish to the children, and the little boy stood up for a moment on the seat to look at the hurly-burly in the pool beyond.

At this moment, a tall man, dressed in black, approached the carriage, and said, "Mr. Field, I am sorry for this; I fear we shall see serious illness in the Dale in this hot weather. Those boys in the pond are in danger of their lives."

"I did not know of it, friend Dixon," replied Mr. Field, "and am as concerned as thou art. Tell them I shall have the water let in again if they do not come out. Phew! what a horrible smell! Drive on, Elihu."

The workmen had now crowded round the carriage to get a good look at Rachel and the children, and

some of them held out their horny hands to the little fellow, whom they had never seen so close before. Mr. Field smiled at the eagerness exhibited by the men to touch the boy's hand.

"Fine boy, is he not?" he said to those next him, and raised his hand to stay the coachman's whip, and so give them all time to see his idol.

"He's like his father, God bless him!" said a careless well-meaning fellow in the crowd.

"Ay, men," said the old ironmaster with emotion, "like his father. God grant he may live to be as good a man!"

At this the men solemnly uncovered their heads and said "Amen," and the carriage moved slowly on through the throng, and then more rapidly up the hill to the gates, where it rolled in out of their view, after which they broke into little groups to compare notes on the boy's looks.

One rough-looking blacksmith held up a finger like a knotted stick, and said, "Bless un, he wrostled wi' my finger," and then he carried the black digit home, held high in air, to show to his wife and children as the finger "the young master had wrostled wi'."



CHAPTER XXIII.

DARKNESS.

“We know not ; but when night had come at last,
And wore to clasp the first embrace of day,
An angel entered, though the door was fast,
And all unseen took what we held away.

“One took the mother from all earthly claim,
From out the bounds of life and all its harms,
But still I think ’twas God himself that came,
And took the child and laid it in her arms.”

“**M**AMMA, my throat is very sore.” To how many mothers have these words been uttered, and with what widely different results ! To some who read these pages they will perhaps call up no recollection but the memory of many coughs and colds which have afflicted their young hopefuls. To others they will bring back the simple phrase with which the last fatal illness of some dear child was ushered in.

“Mamma, my throat is very sore.” So spake little Robert Field to his mother on the day after that on which he had looked over the bridge at the boys’ sport in the pool.

“Let me see it, sonny.”

There was not much that was unusual to see in the round chubby red mouth which he presented wide open for inspection, and some slight remedy was applied, which in an ordinary case would no doubt have been effectual; but sore throats caught by exposure to the miasma of putrescent sewage, even for an instant, often turn out to be very serious things, especially with children.

Rachel Field was not a woman to run to the doctor at the appearance of every slight malady, and as yet her children had enjoyed excellent health; but as the day wore on, the little fellow often repeated his simple complaint, and was unable to swallow any solid food. Then the young mother desired to have some advice, but Mr. Field was not at home, and so she anxiously waited his return, before she sent for the regular medical attendant of the family.

The senior partner had decided on the bridge, the day before, that he would this day resume his proper place, and take on himself the duties temporarily usurped by his junior, Jediah; therefore, he was up betimes, and very early at the fatal pool.

A number of men were now busy driving piles and fixing planks to form a temporary watercourse, in order that the wheels might resume work, and a small army of carts and waggons was invading the dry surface of the mud, where the sun had baked a thin crust over the pestilent stuff beneath. Mr. Field rode round the busy scene many times, giving energetic orders connected with the operations in progress.

Jediah also ventured down on foot at a later hour, not knowing of his brother's early visit, or of his resumption of authority, and stood near the pool, holding a scented handkerchief to his nose, for which there certainly was every necessity, the smell being intolerable as the men dug into the pitchy stuff and heaved it into the carts.

Notwithstanding the stench, the workmen who were thrown out of work by the temporary stoppage of the water-wheels seemed to have a strange predilection for the place, and hung around the banks as if their presence was an essential thing to the proper performance of the disagreeable work in hand.

The boys had been summarily ordered off the mud on the arrival of Mr. Field, and were obliged to content themselves with a distant view of their elysium, varied by occasional investigations of the inky stuff in the carts, with the view to the capture of stray eels therein.

Joshua Field rode up to his brother with a flushed countenance. "Jediah," he said sharply, in the hearing of the men standing near, "thou shouldst not have taken on thyself to give this foolish order without consulting me. This work should have been postponed until winter. Now it will probably breed a plague in the Dale, and the mischief will lie at our door."

Jediah would not have minded this little ebullition elsewhere, out of earshot of others, but it galled him to be taken to task in public, and he answered with acrimony—"It appears to me, Joshua, thou hast mounted thy steed at the wrong side this morning."

Then he turned on his heel and betook him to the inner sanctuary of his office.

No one had ever heard anything approaching to a quarrel between the brothers before, although once or twice in their lives there had been differences of opinion in private; and in ten minutes the news had spread through the Dale that Mr. Joshua had been soundly rating Mr. Jediah about the mudding of the pool.

Various versions of the story were current during the day, one of the most exaggerated being that Mr. Joshua had expressed a wish that Jediah should be ducked in the deepest hole in the pool—an operation the bare contemplation of which seemed to give much satisfaction to some of the workmen, and at which, I am sorry to say, several of their wives volunteered to assist, showing that Jediah, as an old bachelor, was not exactly a favourite with the Dale womenkind.

Mr. Joshua Field did not see Rachel or the children all that day until evening. Indeed, he purposely remained out of the house, wishing to avoid the chance of any infection from their accidental contact with the clothes in which he had been engaged at the pool. He had seen Mr. Dixon early in the day, who mentioned to him that there was only one case of illness in the neighbourhood as yet, being that of the miller's son, who was a troublesome lad, and had been in the pool for some time in pursuit of the fish, contrary to strict orders from his parents, and was now laid up with a bad throat. The doctor fully expected many

other cases before night, and was not wrong in his surmise.

It is to be feared that Mr. Field did not take much interest in the welfare of the miller's son, and, on the whole, would not have much regretted if he had been made a striking example of the effects of disobedience to parents; but on hearing of the lad's illness, he decided to avoid the two children at home, and took his mid-day meal alone in his office, on the plea of business. He was thus absent when Rachel most needed him.

They met as usual at dinner in the great dining-hall, where she always sat at his right hand. He had carefully changed every article of his dress, and was very glad to see her again; but there was no greeting between him and Jediah, who sat in grim silence.

The little boy's throat had grown much worse towards evening, and Rachel had hoped to have seen Mr. Field before dinner on this account; but his unusual delay in dressing had prevented her doing so, and now she could not speak of the matter nearest to her heart until the solemn meal was ended.

During dinner the nurse, whom she had brought with her from Lawley, appeared unexpectedly at one of the doors of the apartment with a white, troubled face, and silently beckoned her mistress away.

A violent constriction of the boy's throat had suddenly set in, and the woman was alarmed. Rachel returned to Mr. Field at once, and nervously begged that one of the servants should be sent for a doctor,

trying at the same time in vain not to alarm the grandfather, who directed two or three of the men in the room to fly in search of Mr. Dixon at once.

It was not very easy to find him now, as there were already over fifty cases of malignant sore throat in the Dale, chiefly amongst the boys who had been in the pool.

"This is thy doing, Jediah," said the elder brother, as he anxiously waited the return of his messengers, or some better tidings from the nursery, whither his grave sister Rebecca had followed Rachel. "Thou hast been my son's enemy," he continued bitterly, "and now thou wilt have destroyed my last hope. The Lord help me!" Then he rose, and hurried out of the room to the bedroom floor of the house, before the astounded Jediah could reply.

Rachel was holding her boy's hands as he lay in his little bed, struggling with a severe spasm, when the old man entered the room, and stood like one transfixed, gazing at the scene before him. Rebecca Field and the nurse were at either side, intently watching the child's face, and in another little cot not far distant sat the little girl in her night-dress, contemplating with wonder in her blue eyes the unusual assemblage around her brother, and thinking herself rather neglected under the circumstances. The child had not seen her grandpapa all day, and now looked with a child's jealous affection for her fair share of attention from some one.

Joshua Field had her in his arms in an instant, with

something like the instinct of a wild animal trying to save its young in extreme peril, and, wrapping the counterpane round the startled little creature, hurried with her to the other wing of the house, as if from the pursuit of death. There had come on him suddenly the terrible fear that the King of Terrors would be present in that room before long, for he knew well that affections of the throat were almost always fatal in his family amongst the children. Mr. Field rang the bell loudly for the female attendants who ministered to Jediah's wants at his side of the house, and consigned the little girl to their charge.

When he returned to the nursery, he found that the doctor had just arrived. The boy was now much exhausted by his struggles, and a light froth was continually forming round his lips.

"Friend Dixon," said Mr. Field, "I shall give thee ten thousand pounds if thou savest him."

The doctor looked sadly at the excited old man.

"Mr. Field," he said, "money will do no good here, and there are many worse than he is in the Dale to-night. You must send at once for assistance; the plague has begun."

Then Joshua Field hastened away, and dispatched men on horses far and near for physicians.

"Is there no hope?" said Rachel. "Doctor, can nothing be done?"

At this moment a severe spasm seized the boy, who was convulsed with pain. The doctor raised him in his arms, and held him until the paroxysm was over;

then he sent a man-servant for some appliances to his surgery, and directed some boiling water to be kept in readiness in a covered kettle. When the next spasm ensued he had a remedy at hand, having secured a flexible tube to the spout of the kettle, and inserted it in the child's mouth, who thus inhaled the light steam, and was instantly relieved. Little beyond this could be done for the poor little fellow, who could not swallow either medicine or nourishment ; but he no longer suffered such acute agony as before.

Later in the night a conclave of physicians assembled round the child's bed, called from every available distance by Mr. Field, and the old adage as to difference of opinion was certainly forcibly illustrated by their proceedings.

Mr. Dixon, who had seen a good many such cases, was anxious just then to do as little as possible, lest the violent symptoms should supervene again ; but as none of the others had seen the child during the throat spasms, and as he was very weak, an attempt was unfortunately made, after much discussion, to give him food through a tube. A sudden renewal of the spasmodic action of the throat resulted, which was very difficult to subdue.

After this his mother would allow no more experiments, and the doctors retired, to see some of the numerous patients in the workmen's cottages, where similar cases were reported every hour. Mr. Dixon remained to fight the battle with death. He wished his professional brethren had been at Jericho, but

discreetly kept his opinion to himself. Towards morning the boy seemed inclined to sleep, and Rachel was beginning to hope ; but the doctor pointed gravely to a dark livid spot which had appeared on the child's white neck, and shook his head. Gradually the spot increased in size, and although there was less pain, there was more foam on the boy's mouth, and greater difficulty in breathing, and so on to the end, when actual suffocation terminated the child's sufferings, and the little fellow yielded up his spirit as the day dawned, lying on his mother's knees, who bent her head in her mute agony—alas for her!—to kiss the sweet lips, from which she imbibed a deadlier poison than that which lurks in the serpent's tooth.

Joshua Field had sat all night outside the door, receiving reports from the nurse at frequent intervals, but unable to endure the sight of his darling in pain. He perfectly understood the case and its dangerous character from the first, but death had followed the last struggle so rapidly, that he could not at once realize the fact that the bright little soul was gone to rest. Then when Rachel laid her dead boy down and knelt beside him, and the tearful nurse pointed mutely aloft as she opened the door and passed out to weep aloud elsewhere, he entered the room with a bewildered aspect as if stunned, and called the boy appealingly by his name, until the doctor mercifully led him away.

There is a grief too great for tears, and such was his. He could not weep, nor indeed could he yet understand his desolation, but, whenever he was allowed,

would wander back to the child's bed, and speak to the dead boy in his old endearing manner, as if to win the child's spirit back again. It was evident now he fancied he was in a hideous dream. He was observed to beat his forehead with his hand, and to pinch his arms. He suddenly left the house and walked rapidly round the garden, cautiously followed by the doctor. By-and-by he returned to the nursery and went hurriedly to the bed, looking eagerly at the dead boy's face, and creeping up to touch it with fear and trembling. The instant he did so, the awful truth seemed to come home to him; he uttered a long wailing cry, and fell on his face in a swoon.



CHAPTER XXIV.

DESOLATION.

“The air is full of farewells to the dying,
And mournings for the dead ;
The heart of Rachel, for her children crying,
Will not be comforted.”

LONGFELLOW.

“**A**ND there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.” It is over three thousand years since the most terrible of all the afflictions which befell the foes of Israel was tersely summed up in the above sentence, and to-day I know no better language to describe the state of things which existed in the Dale a few days after the death of the little heir, to whose young life the people had begun to look forward as the beginning of a better time; but now he had been taken away suddenly from their midst by a fell disease which decimated their children, and in many instances virulently attacked the grown-up members of their families.

The doctors were utterly at fault, and unable to cope with the epidemic. They talked learnedly of malaria and sporadic propagation, and wrote cabalistic

prescriptions in bad Latin, but the plague was not stayed. On the contrary, it spread rapidly on all sides along the course of the river up to Lawley, and down the Dale to Severnbridge, clinging mostly to the cottages near the pools in the bottom of the valley, and all the while the sun poured down its fierce rays on the black stuff which still festered in the heat, sending out its poisonous emanations on the errand of death.

Then a great thunderstorm broke over the valley, and the rain fell in torrents on the hills above Lawley. The Lauter rose rapidly, and came tumbling down in a brown flood, tearing madly over the weirs, and rushing like a frightened racehorse through the new channel formed by the dam in the pool above the works. Hitherto such floods had been absorbed in the reservoir, and so did little damage lower down. Now the little river sped on its way in foaming rage, without impediment, to the lower valley, and burst or overflowed its banks on all sides, adding the misery of a flood of dirty coal-stained water in the cottages, to the wretchedness of the prevailing sickness. At this the harassed workmen left their homes, and swarmed up the Dale in a great body, like angry wasps, armed with such implements as they could hurriedly obtain; and with a loud shout they attacked the slopes of the new dam, and tore open a great gap in its side, through which the angry torrent soon cleared a wider passage into the old channel, filling up the excavations in progress, and covering over the black mud-banks with turbid water to a depth of several feet.

After this, an excited moulder, who had lost two of his children by the epidemic, and whose wife was ill, shouted to the men to punish the miller; whilst a grimy smith, in similar domestic distress, and frenzied at finding his house half-full of water on his return home, vociferated as loudly against Jediah Field.

The mob of workmen separated into two divisions: one streaming over the bridge, and up towards the iron gates of the avenue to the Dale House; the other by the Brightmoor road, to the cottage of Jacob Grimshaw. What they intended to do none of the men knew very clearly, but they were excited and distressed, and felt that there was a great wrong to be redressed, and that Jediah Field and Jacob Grimshaw were in some way the authors of their suffering; therefore they ranged themselves on the side of one or other of the two furious bands, according as their personal feelings, or sympathy with the leaders, led them to wage war against the master or the miller.

Mobs of this kind have often gone great lengths, and done much injury to life and property. The merest straw will set them in a blaze of wrath, and yet the lightest feather may divert their surging passion into some other channel. They had attacked the dam, more as an exhibition of their anger than as a means of stopping the flood and sickness, and in so doing they had unwittingly done something to diminish both, which wiser heads than theirs had overlooked. This feat was easily accomplished without opposition, and now they

looked for some fresh object on which to wreak their vengeance.

We shall follow the men who took the road to the miller's house first. The moulder had waxed valiant at finding himself the leader of a division of malcontents, and threw off his jacket in preparation for the fray, rolling up his blackened shirt-sleeves to the shoulders, and striking fierce blows in the air above his head at imaginary foes.

"Come on, men," he shouted; "we canna stand still to be drowned out o' our housen like rats, whiles our children choke in their beds—no, not for all the millers as ever was."

"He's as bad a lot as t' owd miller in hell, wi' his law and plaguing o' Dale folk, by whom he and his'n gets their livin'," said a blacksmith who carried an iron bar.

"And the first to raise the price o' flour," said a little dirty stone-grinder, who had a large family.

"Let's souse 'im i' th' pool" was shouted in chorus, and then they kicked open the green wicket, and crowded round the miller's door.

Jacob Grimshaw was upstairs with his wife, waiting anxiously for the doctor's verdict as to their son's chance of recovery. The lad had been very near death, but the worst was over, and he could now swallow a little liquid. He was one of the first cases; and as Mr. Dixon lived close by, he had been speedily attended to.

"I think he will pull through," said the doctor with a sigh, thinking of the other boy in the Dale House,

to whom he had been called in so late, and of the difference in the value of the two lives ; for the miller's lad was no favourite of his.

Just then there was heard a loud knocking at the door and a stamping of feet outside. Jacob Grimshaw descended hurriedly to discover the cause.

"Come out, you white-faced villain !" shouted the wild-looking moulder who led the men. "Come out, and stan' up afore a man for five minutes."

Jacob stepped outside the door, and closed it behind him.

"Friends," he said calmly, "what is this?"

"You be a darned villain !" screamed the blacksmith, wielding his bar aloft, and aiming a blow from behind the leader at the inoffensive-looking man who confronted them. The leader himself was squaring his black arms with much effective display, intended more for the encouragement of the men behind him than for the injury of the enemy in front.

Jacob caught the descending bar in his right hand, and wrenched it from his assailant. Then he swung it round his head, close to the moulder's face, who in retreating fell over the legs of the man behind him. At this there was a general stampede to the wicket amongst his supporters. A contemptuous smile spread over Jacob Grimshaw's face for an instant.

"Get up, man," he said, spurning the fallen moulder with his foot ; "get up, and tell me what you want."

Some of the men outside the gate had now armed themselves with stones, but feared to hurl them at the

tall figure by the door, lest they should injure their leader, who was slowly gathering himself up.

At this moment the door opened again, and Mr. Dixon emerged and stood beside Jacob. Mrs. Grimshaw appeared in the porch behind them both, wondering what this assemblage meant.

"Hullo!" said the doctor, "what's this? Benson," he said to the moulder, "you here, and your wife so ill! I'm ashamed of you! What do you want, men?" he continued, striding to the wicket. "Lay down those stones, I say, and come here."

The men dropped their hands sulkily, and approached the doctor.

"He be the cause o' all this sickness," said one of them, "and we be goin' to souse 'im i' th' pool, and blacken his white face."

"You are wrong," said the doctor; "he has nothing to do with it. His own son is very ill, and in great danger up-stairs. Go home, men, to your houses, and cease this folly."

"His son be but small loss, or any o' the breed," said one of the men.

"As much, and perhaps more, to him and his good wife as yours," answered the doctor.

"Ay, his wife be a good 'un, that she be," said the man who had many children. "She sent my old 'ooman a sack o' meal last winter. But miller raises price o' flour."

"Yes, yes," echoed some of the men in the rear, whose passions were cooling down, and who were

anxious to adopt any peaceable solution of the discussion ; “ Mrs. Grimshaw be good enough ; but t’ miller should not ha’ ’sisted on muddin’ t’ pool, and desarves to be soused ; but happen if he loses his lad, like some on us, he’ll be wiser next time.”

Then they all turned to go away, leaving their leader, whose star had waned since his fall inside the fence, in the hands of the miller and his wife, whilst the doctor walked down the road after the men, lest some sudden whim should drive them back again. At the foot of the hill he called them round him, and said a few words.

“ Listen, men,” he began ; “ I’m glad you’ve cut the dam ; but let there be no more violence. Go home, and see that your houses are clean and sweet. I think this thunderstorm will alter things for the better. This is a punishment for our neglect of a simple law, and not the miller’s doing. Remember how often I’ve told you that cleanliness is a better thing for you in your cottages than any medicine of mine.”

Then he turned back with a sigh, remembering that he had been preaching this doctrine in vain to masters and men for twenty years past.

When he reached the miller’s house again, he found the discomfited moulder seated in the kitchen, with a large tankard of ale before him, relating his domestic griefs to Mrs. Grimshaw, and endeavouring to explain to her that he was fairly driven mad at seeing his two children dead and his wife ill ; and he added mournfully, “ The flood com’d to top it all.” When he had

quaffed the brown liquor, he put on his jacket and reeled off, more drunk with sorrow, and trouble, and weakness from illness, than with the strong ale, of which at another time he could have safely imbibed a gallon.

The other division of distracted men, who set out for the Dale House in search of Jediah Field, were still more easily diverted from their angry mission. When they reached the great iron gates, they were met by a sad procession from within, bearing the body of the little boy to its last resting-place. Behind the coffin, which was borne by four of the old servants, walked the man they were in search of, by the side of his brother, and instinctively the men took off their hats, and stood aside to let them pass. They closed in behind, and reverently followed the sorrowing household and the clerks of the Company inside the walled enclosure used by the Friends as their burying-place, where a little grave had been dug in the midst of many grassy mounds, into which the coffin was lowered. After a long interval of silent meditation, a tall man, clad in plain drab cloth, with an ashen face, stood erect and chanted out a kind of funeral oration, much interspersed with long passages of Scripture. Then the earth was filled in, and the turf replaced in a little hillock, and Jediah turned and led the way back again, passing unheeded amongst the men who had just before sought to do him an injury. He was very pale, his eyes were bloodshot, and his thin figure bent; but no one who saw him could doubt that he

grieved deeply for the child, although he endeavoured to bear up before the men like a bar of toughened steel.

“He’s an owd flint,” said the blacksmith, as he led his followers out; “a regl’ar flint; but I’d gie my right ’and for to see the little ’un alive again. There’s the finger he wrostled wi’,” he added, holding it up to view; and the men crowded round him to look once more at the honoured digit, and then drifted off quietly to their several cottages.

The old man who had charge of the burial-place was about to close the gates, when, glancing back, he beheld Mr. Joshua Field still standing by the new-made grave; there he remained motionless for a full hour, with folded arms and bent, uncovered head, looking on the earth that had received the body of the last male heir of his race.

At length the man ventured near, and jingled his keys to attract attention. Mr. Field turned slowly and looked at him. “Yes,” he said, “I shall come presently;” then he raised his streaming eyes to heaven, and murmured, as David did over his son, “I shall go to him, but he cannot come to me.”

Of a truth, the evil spirit of old Grimshaw was amply avenged on his enemy in that hour.

I would that with this page I could lay down my pen, and end the record of sorrows which befell this old man, and then turn to brighter scenes; but ere his feet recrossed his threshold, there met him, as the messengers of evil met Job, one who bore tidings of yet another sorrow to rend his feeble heart. He was called once

more to the chamber of sickness, and this time he stood beside the couch of Rachel, who had been dangerously ill for three days, although the fact had been studiously kept from him until now, at the request of the physicians.

The last kiss she had impressed on her boy's lips was to her the beginning of the end. Within a few hours she felt the same soreness of throat, and, despite of every remedy that could be applied, she grew rapidly worse, until the livid blackness appeared on her fair neck. Then the great pain and fever ceased, but the hopeless stage set in, and she desired to see Mr. Field once more.

"You have been very good to me," she said, when he appeared, pale and trembling, by her bedside. "We shall all meet again very soon, to part no more; you and my Robert and sonny. But you will see that Esther is taken care of, will you not? And perhaps—perhaps—you will build the people a church in the Dale, that we may be remembered."

Then her voice failed, but still she looked on him lovingly out of the depths of her blue eyes, and he held her in his arms until the last, praying earnestly the while that his soul might pass with hers to Him who gave it.

END OF VOL. I.

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